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**THEORY AND PURPOSE OF TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING**



## **The Varieties of Transformative Experience: A Typology of Transformation Outcomes**

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This paper presents the results of an analysis of all the articles published in the Journal of Transformative Education from 2011-2013 – with a focus on the ways that each article defined or implied transformative outcomes. From this analysis, a typology of transformative learning outcomes is presented.

The term “transformative learning” is suffering from evacuation, or the use of a term to refer to such a wide variety of phenomena that it loses any distinctive meaning. For there to be value in the theory, we need clarity about the terms we use. Transformative learning is often used to refer to any qualitative change in the way a person makes meaning. Taking this notion to an extreme, Newman recently claimed that all learning is therefore “transformative,” and that the term should be stricken from the lexicon of adult learning theories (2011). I disagree. We should not act as if there is no such thing as learning experiences that are so qualitatively different, so deep and profound that they can justifiably be considered “transformative.” Neither should we artificially restrict the term “transformative learning” to only a subset of these types of experiences. Rather, what we need to do as a field is to delineate the variety of phenomena that can be understood as “transformative,” so that we can articulate clearly the learning experiences we are trying to describe.

### **Transformative Outcomes**

The first point of clarity needed is the distinction between transformative outcomes, processes that lead to those outcomes, and educational programs that incorporate those processes. Too often, authors use the term “transformative learning” to refer to all three of these things. Fisher-Yoshida, Geller, and Schapiro recommended that the term “transformation” be used to refer to transformative outcomes. They suggested that the term “transformative learning” be reserved for processes of learning that lead to transformation. They recommend that the term “transformative education” be used to refer to the educational practices designed to promote transformative learning” (2009).

Therefore, as a point of genesis, this paper discusses transformation, or the *outcomes* of transformative learning. Currently “transformative learning,” even when used to refer to outcomes, is an umbrella term used to describe any deep, qualitative changes that learners experience. However, when one reads the research literature, it is evident that the learning outcomes that authors describe as *transformative* are many and varied.

### **Examining Transformation as Presented in the Literature**

In May 2014 I performed an analysis of all the articles published in the Journal of Transformative Education from January 2011 through July 2013, which was the most recent volume. This search yielded 35 articles. I searched within each article for explicit articulations of transformative outcomes or, when lacking that, implicit definitions of transformative outcomes. These latter definitions were determined by searching through the theoretical framework, findings, and conclusions presented in the articles and deducing the criteria the authors were using for transformation.

I highlighted excerpts in each article that referred to transformative outcomes and then coded

each excerpt using a combination of open coding and a priori coding based on a framework developed several years ago from an overview of the transformative learning literature (Hoggan, 2012). Most articles described multiple types of change in its description of transformative outcomes. In the 35 articles, there were a combined 88 coded excerpts. (Note, when an article had multiple excerpts with the same assigned code, I combined them so that multiple descriptions in the same article did not skew the overall results of the analysis.) I then evaluated all the excerpts and assigned codes, splitting or merging coding categories as seemed best to capture the intent of the authors when writing about transformation in their articles. In the end, there were six general categories of transformative outcomes, which are presented below.

### *Revised Frames of Reference*

One way that transformation was presented was based on Mezirow's conceptualization of transformative learning as a change in a person's frames of reference. As used in the articles analyzed for this paper, a frame of reference refers to a person's scheme for interpreting meaning from their experiences, a way of viewing the world, and a system of meaning making. Of the 35 articles in the analysis, 15 of them stated or implied this definition of transformation.

There were three important differences, however, in the way that the authors characterized a change in one's frames of reference. One distinction was that transformation was sometimes defined as a change in one's frames of reference without any stipulation about the results of that change. These authors simply wrote about revisions in how people interpreted information (Adamson & Bailie, 2012) or experiences (Jones & Galloway, 2012).

The second distinction was that the revised frame of reference is somehow better. Some authors cited Mezirow in describing a frame of reference that is more discerning, permeable, inclusive, and integrative of experience (Jarvis & Burr, 2011; Willink & Jacobs, 2011). In this way, a frame of reference is "better" because it is more true or, at least, more justifiable. This perspective, when based on Mezirow's work, assumes that there are no fixed truths or completely definitive knowledge. "That is why it is so important that adult learning emphasize contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumption, and validating meaning by assessing reasons" (Mezirow, 2012, p.73). Other ways that a revised frame of reference was considered better was when the new frame of reference was based on a meta-awareness, an advanced form of cognition (Morgan, 2012) or when of a frame of reference that becomes more comparative and reflective due to being exposed to new contexts (Erichsen, 2011). The important thing to note here is that transformation is described as being a change in the way a person makes meaning that is better than it used to be.

The third distinction among articles that defined transformation as a change in one's frames of reference is when transformation is defined as including a new awareness of one's tacit ways of making meaning. Authors wrote, for instance, of becoming aware of one's positionality and the way that shapes their perspectives (Nash, 2013), making subjective knowledge objective (Wang & Yorks, 2012), and of becoming aware of tacit ways of thinking and doing (McAllister, 2011).

### *Specific Frame of Reference*

Some authors presented transformation as the adoption of a specific frame of reference. Of the 35 articles in the analysis, 11 stated or implied this definition of transformation. With one exception, these authors did not use the term "frame of reference" to describe their intended transformative outcomes. Rather, they describe the development of critical consciousness (Tharp, 2012), the development of "new views of social realities" (Hyde, 2013, pg.118), or the adoption of a social justice worldview (MacDonnell & MacDonald, 2011).

An essential part of this definition of transformation is that the educators have predetermined the frame of reference that they want learners to adopt. This perspective is very different from Mezirow's approach whereby educators enter the learning event with students with a (supposed) willingness to question their own frames of reference. Mezirow stressed Habermas' notion of the ideal speech situation for this very reason: that they educator and learner engage together in critical dialogue and critical self-reflection. In contrast, this definition of transformation as a predetermined frame of reference leads educators to foster critical dialogue to explicitly challenge social norms and encourage a specific system of meaning making.

### *Assumptions*

Of the 35 articles in the analysis, 13 defined transformation, at least in part, as a change in assumptions. This conceptualization was the most common way that Mezirow talked about transformative learning, and these authors have followed in that tradition. Mezirow described a person's meaning making structures as habits of mind that he defined as "a set of assumptions – broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience" that encompass sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological and aesthetic assumptions (Mezirow, 2000, p.17). Transformative learning occurs when deep, fundamental assumptions are altered.

The articles in this analysis often described transformation as a change in these underlying worldview assumptions. These assumptions encompass the way a person thinks the world works, as well as how it should be, and is thus often described as expectations and values. Authors in this analysis wrote about "confronting" belief and value systems (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2012, p.233), as well as, more commonly, simply changing worldview assumptions. Extremely few of the articles mentioned specifically the assumptions or types of assumptions that changed as part of the transformations they were describing. Arguably, all learning is a change in assumptions, especially is assumptions is defined as broadly as Mezirow did in his work. Therefore, presumably transformative learning outcomes would involve a change in assumptions that dramatically affects the way a person makes meaning.

### *Ways of Knowing/Thinking*

Of the 35 articles in the analysis, 11 included in their description of transformation a change in a person's ways of knowing or thinking. This outcome could conceivably be categorized, according to Mezirow's description of habits of mind, as a change in epistemic assumptions. That characterization, however, greatly skews this outcome because developing or utilizing new ways of knowing or thinking extends beyond a worldview assumption.

There was a wide variety of ways that authors spoke about new ways of knowing or thinking. Closs and Antonello (2011), for instance, cited Mezirow's description of transformation including a more autonomous way of thinking. Similarly, McCusker (2013) wrote of transformation as including as awareness of how knowledge is made and the person's central role in creating it. Byrnes wrote of transformation as a "shift in basic premises of thought," (2012, p.37) and MacDonnell and MacDonald wrote of "unsettling" a person's ways of knowing (2011, p.204). Some authors wrote of transformation as the adoption of a particular way of thinking, such as "Open Systems Thinking" (Nitschke & Malvicini, 2013), developing a "systemic understanding" of racism (Picower, 2013, p.185) or utilizing a critical feminist epistemology (Gingras, 2012).

From the perspective of integral theory, transformation was portrayed as a change in knowing, including a greater access to a "more unconditioned awareness ... a more clear, wise, and compassionate source of knowing," (Gunnlaugson, 2011), "a shift from typical modes of thought to embodied, authentic self-expression" (p.5), and an "ability to make

contact with emotional, intuitive, imaginative, kinesthetic, and other ways of knowing (Morgan, 2012). Drawing on the work of Maxine Greene, Tanaka, Nicholson, and Farish (2012) described transformation as the “ability to believe in the existence of alternative realities” and “to think in new ways about normal things” (p.272).

### *Ways of Being*

Another description of transformation was a change in a person's ways of being, represented in 8 of the 35 articles. Several authors included this type of transformative outcome as part of a laundry list of outcomes without specificity about those changes, such as Byrnes' description of transformation as a change in thought, being, and action (2012). However, some authors did provide specifics. For instance, Hyde wrote about transformation in terms of being more patient, resilient, compassionate, attentive, responsive, and steady in the face of challenges (2013). Gingras wrote about greater self-acceptance and self-compassion (2012), and McCusker wrote of becoming more accepting of uncertainty and more receptive to altering one's assumptions (2013).

Overall, this type of transformative outcome deals with deeply established dispositions and tendencies. *Ways of being* profoundly affect how a person affectively experiences life, how they physically and emotionally react to experiences, and how they exist in the world. Being more compassionate or attentive, for instance, is considered by these authors to be a transformation, but they are not accurately portrayed as a change in assumptions or way of thinking; they are a way of being in the world.

### *Self*

The most common element in the descriptions of transformation was some sort of shift in a person's sense of self, with 22 articles incorporating it into their transformational outcomes. Some authors described transformation as including a renegotiation or reinvention of identity (Erichsen, 2011, p. 124) or a “re-envision, reordering, and reconstruction of various aspect of the Self” (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011, p.185), or simply as a change in their identity (McCusker, 2013; Ashby, 2013; Jones & Galloway, 2012; Rusch & Brunner, 2013).

Commonly, authors wrote of a shift in a person's sense of sense in relation to others (Jarvis & Burr, 2011; Hyde, 2013; Adamson & Bailie, 2012). Byrnes described transformation as recognizing one's uniqueness, as well as one's commonality with the rest of humanity (2012). Some authors focused on transformation as a realization of one's embeddedness in one or more systems (physical, social, etc.), manifesting in a greater sense of connection or shared humanity (Gunnlaugson, 2011; Williams, 2013). Others defined transformation as a greater integration between their intrapersonal and interpersonal minds (Ashby, 2013) or as a “welcoming and connecting (of) all aspects of being human” (Byrnes, 2012, p.25).

Lastly, transformation was portrayed as a shift in one's sense of self in terms of their control over their lives or other aspects of the world. Themes of personal emancipation (Babacan & Babacan, 2012; Closs & Antonello, 2011; Hanson, 2013), empowerment (Lysaker & Furuness, 2011; Nitschke & Malvicini, 2013), and self-efficacy (Nitschke & Malvicini, 2013) comprised this type of transformation.

### *Behavior*

Eight articles included a change in behavior as a transformation outcome. Behavior has long been addressed in the transformative learning literature, especially as transformative learning acted as a “guide to future action” (Herbers, Antelo, Ettl, & Buck, 2011; Mezirow, 2012). Some authors described specific behaviors, such as new ways of engaging in teamwork, leadership, and communication (Closs & Antonello, 2011; McAllister, 2011) or teaching (Byrnes, 2012; Glowacki-Dudka, Jones, Brooks, Flynn, Frankenburger, Kiskick-Kelly,



Rediger, & Smith, 2012). Other descriptions of transformation alluded to changes in habitual behavior (Adamson & Bailie, 2012; James, Collins, & Samoylova, 2012; Gum, Grenhill, & Dix, 2011). In none of the articles was behavior the sole transformative outcome. Its mention in these few articles speaks to the notion that transformation should have an impact on the learner's life such that it affects their actions in addition to other cognitive or affective effects.

### **Other Observations**

Despite the wide variety of transformative outcomes portrayed in the Journal of Transformative Education during 2011-2013, some types of transformation that have been discussed in the research literature did not show up in them. Notably, there were no articles that considered cognitive development as a transformation, despite the fact that scholars still consider cognitive development a viable catalyst for and outcome of transformative learning (Taylor and Elias, 2012). There likely are other ways that people change that did not show up in this review. Future research should continue to articulate additional components of transformation beyond those illustrated in this paper.

The transformative outcomes described above were not presented as distinct outcomes, separate from each other. In fact, they were usually mentioned in passing without any significant elaboration on how the authors were defining *transformation*. The outcomes listed above were presented as component parts of an overall transformation. On average, the articles in this analysis specified two or three of the above components. For instance, in describing transformation as used in their study, they might have specific changes in *assumptions* and in *ways of being*. The omission of other components was likely due to a lack of focus on the definition of transformation rather than an indication that the other components were not also involved in the overall transformations. In some cases the authors simply described transformation as a change in *frames of reference* without any specificity about how those frames of reference changed.

Using the generic *Frame of Reference* as a description of transformation is inadequate. A shift in a person's *Ways of Being* extends beyond how a *Frame of Reference* that generates more justifiable beliefs and opinions, as Mezirow described. Likewise, an enhanced sense of self-efficacy or empowerment is not adequately portrayed as an assumption about the self, and using new *Ways of Thinking* is more than a change in epistemic assumptions. *Frame of Reference* is probably too broad of a designation for the purpose of specificity, as they are comprised of other components (such as *Assumptions* and *Ways of Thinking/Knowing*) and exclude other important components.

A final observation is that transformative learning was used to refer to a wide range of outcomes in terms of their impact, and some descriptions of learning outcomes seemed too specific to a particular context to deserve the description of *transformation*. Two examples are illustrative. In Glowacki-Dudka et al.'s article (2012), the learning outcomes revolved around the adoption of new teaching behaviors. There was no mention of ways that the learning outcomes involved other aspects of the learners' lives. Similarly, Picower's (2013) article was based on a learning activity that taught a critical race epistemology – or *Way of Thinking*. For white students, the learning was considered transformative because they exhibited the ability to use a critical race theory epistemology. The students in this latter article may have experienced transformative learning outcomes, but it seems that the use of a critical race epistemology would need to become habitually used in a variety of contexts rather than only in the context of the very class in which they learned that epistemology. In the case of both these articles, there was no evidence presented that the learning was impactful enough on the learners' lives to be considered transformative.

### **Implications for Future Research and Theory**

As a field, we are defining transformation more broadly than did Mezirow, who limited it to changes in one's tacit frames of reference "to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow, 2012, p.76). As evidenced in this analysis, authors often use transformation to refer to deeply transformative changes that extend beyond this description. The use of a broader definition is a good thing. We should not act as if there is no such thing as learning experiences that are so qualitatively different, so deep and profound that they can justifiably be considered "transformative" but neither should we artificially restrict the term "transformative learning" to only a subset of these types of experiences. By beginning with a broad definition of transformation, we avoid the artificial limitation of the scope of our field. A suitably broad definition of transformation is: a dramatic change in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes and interacts with the world.

An important part of this definition is the extent or degree of the "change." Mezirow addressed the notion of degree by delineating between *habits of mind* and *points of view*, the former being broad and generalized, the latter being more limited. A few of the articles in this analysis referred to outcomes that were very limited in nature, specific to one context, and did not affect any of the components in a way that seemed truly "transformational." Transformation of specific points of view seems overstated; the notion of transformational learning should be that the outcome drastically changes a person. Using Mezirow's term, the theory should be applied only to those learning experiences whereby *habits of mind* are impacted. If we allow the terms "transformation" or "transformative learning" to apply to changes of small degrees and in limited contexts, then we overstate the outcome, and the theory falls victim to evacuation. We should restrict the use of the term "transformation" to outcomes that are broadly impactful in a person's life.

After starting with a broad definition of *transformation*, researchers should be very specific about the variety of ways that *transformation* impacts the way a person experiences, conceptualizes and interacts with the world. The components derived from this analysis provide a typology of transformative outcomes, an organizing structure that researchers can use to articulate what they mean by *transformation*. When describing the outcomes of transformative learning, researchers should address the extent to which each of the components is affected and the range of contexts in which the change is manifest. Following is a tool that researchers can use that incorporates a typology of transformative outcomes and focuses attention on clarifying the impact of each component.

Typology of Transformative Outcomes:

Transformation Component	How Changed / Evidence of Deep Impact	Evidence of Impact on Multiple Life Contexts
Self		
Assumptions		
Ways of Knowing/Thinking		
Ways of Being		
Behavior		
Capacity		

The sixth component, *Capacity*, did not show up in the articles in this analysis. Nevertheless, many authors have written on cognitive development and its connection with transformative learning (Kegan, 2000; Daloz, 2000; Taylor & Elias, 2012). Every component in this process

is bounded by the person's current capacity based on their level of development, as well as their ability or tendency to use a particular developmental level in a given context.

This typology aids educators to acknowledge and specify the ways that they are attempting to help learners change the way they experience, conceptualize and interact with the world. Any particular transformative experience may include multiple types of the learning outcomes described above, and scholars should be explicit about the types of learning outcomes they are describing.

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## **Embodied experience, transformative learning and social change: notes on a theory of social learning**

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### **Introduction: Speaking at cross purposes?**

Mezirow's Transformative Learning theory (TLT) has been remarkably influential set of ideas and continues to appeal to educators embedded in a wide variety of traditions, disciplines and settings. According to Edward Taylor (2007) it is now the most researched and discussed theory of adult learning in the US and holds increasing sway in European educational scholarship. Consequently, as anyone who has attended a TL conference can attest, Mezirow's ideas have been developed in a dizzying variety of directions (including in ways that Mezirow may feel, with some justification, have little in common with his approach). I think it is fair to say that at this point that TL has become a umbrella term – or perhaps more correctly speaking a capacious metaphor - under which various adult education traditions and diverse educational and political agendas jostle up alongside each other under the illusion that, at least in some tangential way, we all mean the same thing when we speak of transformation.. So pausing to think about the many, often incommensurable, meanings given to transformative learning – the task of this network and conference - seems to me timely. Just as importantly, at this particular historical and political juncture -in a time of crisis but also a period in which we are witnessing, albeit in bursts, a quickening of the emancipatory pulse globally – I think it is also necessary to return to a defining and constitutive concern of adult education – how learning can contribute to social change.

With this academic and political backdrop in mind I want to examine Mezirow's ideas (rather than the busy field of TL as a whole), highlight some of the strengths and lacunae in his work and sketch out how elements of TLT might be integrated within a critical, realist theory of social learning explicitly orientated to social change. To do this I need to cover quite a lot of ground in a short time and as such the aim here is offer propositional and speculative notes on a topic rather than a summary of a comprehensive theory of learning (such as developed by Illeris, 2003, 2007). I will also not use empirical research material in the paper but I should mention that these ideas have been developed in working through biographical accounts given by students' in higher education that I have gathered alongside colleagues across Europe (Finnegan, Merrill and Thunborg, 2014; West, Fleming & Finnegan, 2013).

### **Mezirow's transformative learning theory**

Mezirow's (1981, 1990, 1991, 2007) version of TLT has been developed over several decades and gone through several distinct iterations (Kitchenham, 2008). It is probably best described as a powerful synthesis of radical and pragmatist educational philosophy and developmental psychology. For Mezirow (1991) learning is as a core human activity and in exploring this topic Mezirow, in Deweyan fashion, puts meaning making right at the centre of learning theory and indeed human life more generally. Learning according to Mezirow (1991) is primarily about negotiating, amending and transforming the way we make meaning and how we use meaning to act in the world. It is important to note - for reasons I will return to later - that meaning making is very clearly depicted by Mezirow as a socialised process but in his analysis tends to focus on how *individual's* 'meaning schemes' made up of specific beliefs, knowledge, value judgements and feelings embedded in broader sets of assumptions ('meaning perspectives') *change* through learning (see 1991 especially pp. 5-6 and pp 154-

156).

Mezirow (2007), pace Habermas, also identifies different 'domains' of learning (which he terms the instrumental and communicative domains) which are distinct in terms of the forms they take and uses they are put to in society (roughly speaking these relate to the transfer of information/skills/techniques and the development of shared interpretations of the world). Thus, quite rightly to my mind, even if I might disagree with the way he chooses to distinguish these domains, Mezirow does acknowledge that there are a wide variety of bodies of knowledge – with diverse applications and modes of employment - that might be relevant to adult learners in a highly complex society. This may seem an entirely banal observation but too often this simple fact – the busy and layered nature of knowledge creation in contemporary society - is passed over in discussions of learning. But the existence of a multiplicity of learning processes and knowledge domains has considerable implications for how we might frame and delimit, what we mean by emancipatory learning and producing 'really useful knowledge'.

In reviewing this epistemological landscape Mezirow (1981, 1991, 2007) also offers a clear set of criteria for differentiating and evaluating different types of learning. He holds that truly significant learning involves critical reflection. It is only through developing our capacity for critical reflection that we can exploit the immanent potential of the knowledge and information at our disposal in an empowering way. Moreover, like Dewey and Freire, Mezirow (1991, 2007) argues that it is only through critical reflection that we can begin to think more rationally and systematically about our own circumstances and self. This in turn is the basis for becoming more capable of acting in a way that enhances personal and collective freedom. He (1991, 2007) makes a further important distinction and argues that critical reflection can be carried out with varying degrees of intensity and depth and distinguishes between reflection on content, processes or fundamental premises. For Mezirow it is the latter of these forms of critical reflection that is the most profound and has the greatest transformative potential. Learning is truly transformative when previously taken for granted assumptions and norms and roles are reflected upon and modified. This involves rethinking deeply held, and often distorted beliefs, about who we are and our lifeworld. Mezirow (1991, pp. 167-174) maintains this process of 'subjective reframing' follows identifiable phases in which the learner moves from a disorienting dilemma through to self-examination (based on collaborative dialogue) to a major rethinking of one's assumptions. If successful Mezirow (1991, p. 155) this can lead:

toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective and that, insofar as it is possible, we all naturally move toward such an orientation. *This is what development means in adulthood* It should be clear that a strong case can be made for calling perspective transformation the central process of adult development,

Doing this successfully also refigures relationships and results in novel courses of action. While this type of learning is always empowering (in the sense of strengthening individuals and communities capacity to think and act rationally and justly) it is *not necessarily* socially emancipatory as this has typically been described in radical adult education (i.e resulting in social action for egalitarian objectives). We benefit by reshaping our assumptions through rational democratic deliberation but the precise relationship to broader social change is described as contingent on circumstances and needs of learners. Consequently, the site of change is envisaged primarily in terms of the transformation of the inner mental landscape of an individual learner which may or may not have broader social consequences.

I think this careful differentiation of forms, types and uses of learning explains a good deal of Mezirow's influence as this precision lends the theory a good deal of conceptual and explanatory force. It also manages to restate and develop fundamental precepts of adult education in a way that responds to a growing social need- to devise or discover satisfactory *biographical solutions* to challenges resulting from rapid and ceaseless *social change* (Alheit & Dausien, 2000). There is mounting evidence that we live in societies where this specific form of reflexive action- the change and transformation of the self- is highly valued and perhaps even imperative in our culture. Certainly, my own research - mainly with non-traditional students in higher education - indicates that this phenomenon is very widespread and consequently something akin to 'subjective reframing', often linked to major life transitions, leading to more integrated and inclusive ways of thinking and acting appeared frequently as a theme in these biographical accounts of life and learning.

### **Affective, embodied experience and social power: the limits of Mezirow's TLT**

So Mezirow gives a sophisticated account of knowledge and critical reflection, holds firmly to the promise that this remaking of the self through education can readily be turned to progressive ends and reworks adult education ideas in a way that responds to important social phenomena. I think this means that Mezirow's TLT remains of real importance in adult education theory. Despite this I believe the way Mezirow approaches the interplay of self and culture and the relation this might have to processes of learning and social change needs careful interrogation. Overall, he does not explain just how profoundly contextual and contingent developmental trajectories are and related to this there are two particularly noticeable theoretical gaps within Mezirow's TLT that I want to highlight here. First of all he employs a somewhat narrow 'rationalist'- and therefore limited- conception of learning and cognition which minimises the importance of affective, embodied experience. Second Mezirow underemphasises the social, historical and collective dimensions of adult learning and does not have an adequate theory of power.

For me the importance of rational, critical reflection aimed at strengthening personal autonomy and bolstering collective agency in adult learning theory is beyond question. However, the way Mezirow (1991, 2007) discusses learning and cognitive processes is curiously disembodied. Emotions are mentioned and discussed by Mezirow but mainly as something to be moved through and beyond in transformative learning. This stands at odds with our everyday experience of cognition as an embodied and affective process as well as what has been discovered recently through neuroscience (Damasio, 1994) and through the philosophical and social scientific inquiry of feminist scholars (Kittay, 1999; Lynch *et al.*, 2009; Nussbaum, 2001). This body of work alerts us to the fact we are fundamentally needy, vulnerable, affective beings who make meaning, and act rationally, through our commitments, attachments and feelings (McIntyre, 1999; Sayer, 2011). The challenge then is to identify modes of research and theorising which keep us fully attuned to the "elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought" (Williams, 1977, p. 132). The importance of embodied and affective experience to learning is readily apparent when one does biographical research (Finnegan, Merrill and Thunborg, 2014; West, 1996; West, Fleming & Finnegan, 2013). These dimensions of learning cannot be treated as something that should painstakingly distilled off to get at the crystalline truth of cognition. Furthermore, I believe it is a mistake to treat experience as something straightforward and transparent- often we perceive ourselves and other 'through a glass darkly' - and need to hold on to a sense of the complexity and varied dimensions of consciousness that feed into learning. In a similar vein John Dirkxx has argued that any theory of transformation requires a sense of:



that shadowy inner world, that part of our being that shows up in seemingly disjointed, fragmentary, and difficult to understand dreams, of spontaneous fantasies that often break through to consciousness in the middle of carefully orchestrated conversation, deep feelings and emotions that erupt into our waking lives with a force that surprises even us, let alone those who know us. I want to know more about that part of the inner world that volunteers questions without being asked (Dirkxx, Mezirow and Cranton., 2006, p. 126)

The point is that our ways of being, doing, knowing and feeling are immensely complex. Any theory of learning has to account for the conscious and subconscious elements and the personal and social dimensions of learning which are brought forth in various combinations within specific contexts and through various patterns of human relationship (Merrill, 2007; Williams, 1977). Although Mezirow writes in full knowledge of this complexity – after all he draws heavily on key ideas within psychodynamic literature - he chooses a form of presentation and argumentation that means this insight is never fully explored. As a result I would argue his version of TLT does not have all the conceptual tools necessary for being sensitised towards and interpreting learning as a process based on embodied experience.

One other frequently voiced, and to my mind justified criticism of Mezirow's work, is that it also insufficiently equipped to explain the dynamics and logic of social power (Inglis 1997; Murray, 2013; for more sympathetic accounts see for example Brookfield & Preskill, 2008; Fleming, 2002). While the socio-cultural and sociological aspects of learning are constantly present in one form or other social relations are rarely placed centre stage and overall are given much less space than the psychological theories of development that he discusses in his writing. We can see this for instance in his treatment of the issues of employment, class and social movements in *Transformative dimensions in adult learning*. Furthermore, as noted earlier, he presents transformative learning as something which may or may not be linked to social action and although he is clearly concerned with emancipatory learning it appears as one possible *subset* of transformative learning. This leaves the question of how transformative learning may or may not be linked to wider social change undertheorised. This is compounded by the fact that Mezirow pays relatively little attention to the patterns and sources of collective agency from 'below'. So while he consistently stresses that informed action and higher levels of autonomy do require collaboration and dialogue the overwhelming focus is change on an individual level. I believe that this reflects the strong influence psychology as a discipline on Mezirow's work which as a subject remains, for the most part, very firmly bound to methodological individualism (Harre, Clarke & De Carlo, 1985) and systematically underplays the socially structured, mediated and contextual nature of learning (Cuningham, 1998).

### **Notes towards a theory of social learning**

I want to build on this review of Mezirow's TLT and offer a provisional sketch of how some of Mezirow's ideas might be integrated in a broader theory of learning which can account for the complex nature of lived experience informed and shaped by power relations. In doing this I will draw on aspects of the work of Bateson (2000), Bourdieu (1990), Vygotsky (1978) Honneth (1995, 2007) and Engestrom (1987). In order to clear some ground I will move away from Mezirow and make a couple of preliminary remarks on how I conceptualise learning and suggest alternative criteria for differentiating and valuing various types of learning.

Learning is central to all human activity at the most basic level is best conceived as a fundamental human capacity for self-monitoring, adaptation and change in the *collective* and collaborative organisation of social activity. This means that learning always occurs within webs of human activity "based on material production, mediated by technical and psychological tools as well as by other human beings" (Engestrom, 1987, p. 48). Over history

the forms and types of learning required within the division of labour have become increasingly complex and specialised and needs to be analysed as a highly varied set of cultural and historical processes.

Building on this we can say, following Vygotsky (1978), that socialisation and individualisation are interlinked processes which occurs as a movement through culture to higher levels of individuation (in Vygotsky's terms initial human development can be traced from the interpsychological plane through to the intrapsychological plane). The formation of identity, the shaping of a full inner life, and of course learning therefore depend on human interaction within specific contexts using the symbolic tools and artefacts available in a given culture. We can develop this insight further and posit that adult learning, based on intersubjective modes of interaction and cultural mediation, is central to the way we develop throughout life (Honneth, 1995, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective one of the main tasks of critical, educational research is to trace how collective forms of activity and learning are dialectically related to individuals' inner worlds and how this informs specific experiences of learning and education. I believe this the issue is right of the heart of developing a critical and realistic and therefore truly psycho-social theory of learning. As I hope my critique of Mezirow will have made clear this means we need take embodied experience within 'activity systems'- in all its layered complexity as our primary focus in analysing learning. I think to do this adequately entails a double focus on how we are made and remade through intersubjective experience and the how this process is shaped by institutions and practices (Honneth, 1995; 2007). Obviously in making these remarks I want to shift the emphasis away from meaning making and communication (the foci of Mezirow) and instead foreground multidimensional embodied experience and social practice. This also means taking a less dichotomous approach to 'individual and society' and putting a greater stress on intersubjectivity.

In developing this sketch a little further I want to turn to the intriguing proposal of Gregory Bateson's (2000) who maintained that the most useful ways of differentiating between types of learning is the degree and extent to which a given type of learning is reflexive. He identifies five types of learning (0, I, II, III, IV) each of which is defined by its complexity and transformative range. The simplest form (0) is a basic stimulus and response model of learning and the highest (Learning IV) is a perhaps wholly ideal type of learning, which completely transcends the paradigms within which learning happens.

I am not concerned with deploying this exact framework here but I do find it very suggestive. In particular I am interested in what happens if we approach Bateson's proposal historically and sociologically and examine how reflexive learning, linked to symbolic practices and new technologies, becomes a source of power for maintaining and transforming human culture. Like the Greek philosopher Castoriadis (1987, p. 42). I am especially interested in how reflexivity augments the "capacity for internal contestation" and allows us to question dogmas and ultimately to reimagine the social world. In other words highly reflexive forms of learning – and I wish to claim Mezirow's TLT as one type of such learning– are a source of social power. Logically this entails differentiating learning processes according to their scope and intensity and the extent to which various modes of reflexive activity enhance autonomy and allow us to reorganise social practices. Within this provisional framework I think learning can be divided into four levels i.e. 1) learning which is largely unconscious and adaptive, 2) reflexively adaptive learning 3) biographically transformative learning 4) those types of learning capable of effecting emancipatory institutional and social change.

The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990) and in particular his concept of habitus is very useful in thinking through the first two levels of learning described above.

This concept was developed as part of a more general theory of social practice which seeks to transcend pretensions of ‘god’s eye view’ structuralism and the pitfalls of methodological individualism. Bourdieu (1990, p. 53) explains:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations, that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them

So our embodied knowledge of the social world-informs our conscious and unconscious ways of making sense of things. This is similar to what Mezirow names as the “epistemic, cultural and psychic assumptions within which our past experience assimilates and transforms new experience” which are “largely prerational and unarticulated presuppositions”(1991, p. 62; for the links with TLT see Finnegan 2011). However, I think the notion of habitus (supplemented with critical and feminist theories of intersubjectivity) improves on ‘meaning perspectives’ in two crucial respects; Bourdieu fully acknowledges the practical, embodied and affective dimensions of existence and he explicitly, and in some detail, theorises how individuals’ experience is shaped by their position in social space and their access to cultural and material resources. He also argues the existence of deep and durable dispositions means we frequently act in semi-conscious and almost automatic ways and we often simply follow ‘our sense of the game’. Amongst other things this serves to naturalise social relations and consequently Bourdieu argues that habitus is crucial to the process of social reproduction. I think this helps explain a great deal of largely unconscious or even conscious reflexively but adaptive learning. Bourdieu is foregrounding something which appears only as a background to TL in Mezirow – that much of social life and learning is about ‘getting by’ and this can often follow patterns – notwithstanding an orientation to development and human flourishing – that are self-limiting or even damaging. This is not primarily, Bourdieu would argue, because we have distorted assumptions- although these processes can result in misrecognition and being misrecognised- but rather it reflects the immanent logic of social relations. I think acknowledging that social experience and structures of power is the basis for a lot adult learning that is largely unconscious or minimally reflexive learning aimed at adaptation (including in formal settings) is a useful place to start in any theory of social learning.

Bourdieu is overwhelmingly concerned with how power naturalises and reproduces itself but his body of work is much weaker when it comes to explaining everyday agency and how people act on their desires, attachments and concern in ways that create change. Underplaying the way people reason, value and intervene, often in unpredictable ways, in their own lives is a characteristic of certain forms of sociological analysis as is just as limiting as methodological individualism (Finnegan, 2011). Certainly in the type of educational research I have conducted students have regularly discussed- with passion and acuity- the importance they give to finding space and resources to rethink aspects of their own lives. This *has* often resulted in major changes in identity and relationships. If we overlook these changes we will miss a great deal of what is truly significant and valuable in adult experiences of learning and education. As mentioned earlier I think Mezirow’s theory has a good deal of explanatory power in exploring such accounts and the process, challenges and rewards involved in such subjective reframing especially if we read him alongside other scholars who are concerned with relationality and embodied experience.

But I share the Finnish thinker Yrjo Engestrom’s belief that the most valuable form of learning goes well beyond this and is not simply another variant of transformative learning.

This is learning which problematises the function and form of broader activity systems and can therefore transform institutions and social practices. Engestrom (2001, p. 2, see also 1987) calls this 'expansive learning' and argues:

in an expansive learning cycle, the initial simple idea is transformed into a complex object, into a new form of practice. At the same time, the cycle produces new theoretical concepts - theoretically grasped practice - concrete in systemic richness and multiplicity of manifestations. [...] The expansive cycle begins with individual subjects questioning the accepted practice, and it gradually expands into a collective movement or institution.

Engestrom quite rightly argues that such expansive learning necessarily involves collaborative practice and can only occur across networks through self-conscious collective effort to identify and *work through the contradictions in a given activity system*. This creativity certainly relies on individual transformations within an activity system but it is not a precondition that all participants within a system experience something akin to a 'perspective transformation'. Most importantly of all this learning has an effect on a different scale- it is the type of learning that can change institutions, knowledge forms and is the basis for new emergent practices and ultimately even new form of social relations. What this means in terms of the discussion above is that such learning can change a biographically shaped habitus but also can change the structure of social space. I believe this is a far more accurate characterisation of socially transformative learning than offered by Mezirow and goes well beyond the idea that learning for social change is a variant or subset of cumulative experiences of transformative learning. If expansive learning is linked to explicit theory of human flourishing based on equality and freedom it also offers a more nuanced way of thinking about how individual experience and learning can be understood in relation to historical change and progressive social movements,

Obviously, this is just a sketch and requires much further elaboration and development but what I am suggesting through my reading of Mezirow is that it has a great deal of explanatory power but neglects the embodied, affective, layered, intersubjective and power saturated nature of learning. I also argued for a different way of differentiating between types of learning than Mezirow. Bourdieu is correct that that embodied experience in social space results in the formation of dispositions and practices which are adaptive. But this is only one part of the story: within this differentiated theory of learning reflexivity is just as important as durable dispositions for explaining social phenomena and learning processes. It is the scope, scale and effect of reflexive learning that is important. Mezirow helps to theorise a widespread, and sociologically significant, orientation to transformation on a biographical level (although his model of cognition tends to underemphasise the contradictory, contextual, unfinished and elliptical nature of such changes). As important as this is though we need to clearly distinguish it from expansive learning and be far more explicit in TL influenced adult education about the specific value of the sort of collective and collaborative learning which can effect meaningful social change.

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## What is the purpose of Transformative Learning?

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Originally the purpose of Transformative Learning was learning for liberation and emancipation. Later it became more functional, not least in relation to management. But gradually Transformative Learning has rather become a kind of a movement with a very unclear purpose. In this papers it is argued that Transformative Learning today be understood as as a learning theoretical term for the specific type of learning which involves changes in elements of the learner's identity.

### *The original purpose of mainly cognitive liberation or emancipation*

When Jack Mezirow in 1978 launched the term and issue of Transformative Learning (TL) the immediate background and reference for this was a study of learning processes women's re-entry programs in community colleges (Mezirow 1978). As an important source of inspiration Mezirow pointed to Paulo Freire's work on emancipation through elementary schooling of illiterate Brazilian rural workers as described in his famous books "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" and "Cultural Action for Freedom" (Freire 1970, 1971). So there can be no doubt that the original purpose of TL was some kind of liberation or emancipation from oppression or other restricting life conditions.

In this connection it is worth noting that Mezirow for such learning chose to "invent" the quite new and specific term of TL, whereby it was emphasized that the learning process itself in these cases is different from other learning such as school learning or everyday learning. In this way he differed from and went a step further than Freire, who used the term of emancipation but did not describe this as a specific kind or type of learning.

Mezirow might also have referred to the term of "significant" learning as launched already in 1951 by Carl Rogers and defined as learning involving "a change in the organization of the self" (Rogers 1951, p. 390, see also Rogers 1961, 1969). But he chose to launch his own new term and define it as learning involving a change in the learner's meaning perspectives, frames of reference, and habits of mind (see e.g. Mezirow 1978, 1991, 2006). In this way Mezirow's concept was more more narrow than Rogers' as the change is mainly related to the cognitive dimension of the self and thereby seems to exclude emotional and social elements – which has later often been remarked and criticized by other learning theorists (e.g. Cranton 2005 [1994], Dirkx 2006, 2012, Illeris 2004, 2014, Tennant 2012).

Mezirow has later accepted these objections (Mezirow 2006, 2009), but has not suggested any other definition of TL. So it can be concluded that the purpose of TL as liberation or emancipation in Mezirow's understanding refers to a mainly cognitive mental process of comprehension.

### *The later development towards a more functional purpose*

However, when Mezirow during the early 1980s initiated the "Adult Education Guided Intensive Study" (AEGIS) doctoral program at Teachers College, Columbia University, which was built up as an ambitious education by the implementation of TL in practice, the purpose had obviously changed from an orientation towards liberation or emancipation to a more general personal development or maturation through a very demanding, challenging and also expensive academic course of study and learning activities.

On the one hand Mezirow was here very intent of securing transformative processes by

demands of substantiating, explaining, undertaking, concluding, discussing and reflecting exercises, projects and dissertations, and by serious dialogue and discussions between teachers and students. But on the other hand these demands as well as the considerable study charges could not avoid excluding possible students who did not have a solid cultural and financial background and thus in no way could be regarded as oppressed or restricted.

So in this way the purpose of TL in reality moved from the original idealistic terms in the direction of being of a more practical and functional kind, either in relation to management, administration, business or similar activities, or in relation to a personal development, maturation and understanding.

#### *Transformative learning as a movement*

At the same time the term of TL gradually became more well-known and used in a wider range of academic and adult education connections. This clearly appears from the various edited books with examples and discussions of transformative activities and learning which have been published throughout the later decades (e.g. Mezirow and Associates 1990, 2000, Taylor 2006, Mezirow, Taylor and Associates 2009, Taylor and Cranton 2012).

This also clearly indicates how the use and understanding of the term of TL has spread in many directions as more people have been acquainted with the concept and seen its possibilities in relation to a broad range of activities and endeavours with connections to adult education at all levels. But this development has also entailed that the meaning and purpose of the expression has gradually been extended, widened and in some cases watered down, so much that the original intentions can hardly be retrieved. On this background Australian Michael Newman in a recent article found it relevant to "call transformative learning into question", because in many cases it has been used in relation to what is simply just "examples of good adult education practice" (Newman 2012).

The most excessive consequence of this development has been that some followers and fans now talk about TL as a "movement". At the TL conference in San Francisco in 2012 even the organizers constantly used this term, and in some of the plenary sessions devotees stood up and reported or in some cases rather confessed their individual experiences of transformations. So there is today a tendency, which to me seems very problematic, that the term of TL is used in ways which may reach from any learning which goes further than traditional classroom education to kinds of spiritual or even religious conversion, released from any academic content or ambition – and the purpose seems in such cases to be a kind of personal belonging or feeling good.

This development certainly constitutes a very dangerous challenge to TL as a serious endeavour, and it may be relevant in this connection to draw attention to the concept of "experiential learning", which appeared parallelly to TL in the 1980s (e.g. Kolb 1984, Boud et al. 1985, Weil and McGill 1989), reached its summit at the Cape Town conference in 1996, but now has a very secluded position – as I see it, precisely because there was no common definition and limitation as to what could be marketed as experiential learning. (Actually David Kolb himself in his very popular book on this topic came to the conclusion that all learning is basically experiential).

#### *Transformative learning as a theoretical concept*

But there has also been another and more academic and conceptual line of development in relation to the issue of TL, which can be tracked at least back to the middle of the 1990s, and which is fundamentally about seeing TL as a specific type of learning and relating it to other learning theoretical and learning psychological concepts. It is actually in this connection remarkable that Mezirow did not make any references of this kind. The central references or sources of inspiration he has mentioned were pedagogical (Freire), psychiatric (Gould), philosophical (Kuhn), and communication theoretical (Habermas) – (cf. e.g. Mezirow 2006).

However, quite quite a few attempts have been made by others to connect the concept of TL to



other psychological and learning theoretical understandings and frameworks. For example, Patricia Cranton and John Dirkx have linked TL to the general psychological and developmental theory of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (Cranton 2005 [1994], Dirkx 2006, 2012), Robert Kegan has placed TL inside a psychological constructive-developmental approach (Kegan 2000), Mark Tennant has – parallelly to the ideas of Carl Rogers mentioned above – suggested that TL should be understood and defined as learning implying changes in the self (Tennant 2004), and the author of this paper has in 2004 included TL as a fourth fundamental type of learning (in addition to cumulation, assimilation and accommodation) in his general learning theory, and in 2014 proposed that TL should be defined as learning involving changes in the identity (Illeris 2004, 2014).

It is an implicit part of such attempts that TL is seen as a very important contribution to the understanding of human learning by including also the most advanced and far reaching processes of mental change and development in the scope of learning possibilities, and this is also very much in line with the general perspectives of late modernity and globalization, which exceedingly involves demands for individual and societal flexibility and readiness to consider and undertake mental processes of transformation. In this way the purpose of TL is as an academic and theoretical concept to contribute to a better and more precise understanding and practice of human learning.

#### *Transformative learning as changes in the identity*

When this purpose is taken seriously the question of the precise formulation of the definition of TL becomes important because as a theoretical basis for promoting and supporting TL it is necessary to know what the concept stands for and involves. There must be both a precise statement of which processes can be regarded as transformative and a clear boundary to indicate when a change can be understood as so mentally important that it can be accepted as a transformation, i.e. a change into a qualitatively different mental state or condition.

It is such a serious examination of possible ways of defining TL that I have tried to carry through in my recent book on "Transformative Learning and Identity" (Illeris 2014). The background has exactly been a wish to contribute to the maintenance of the qualities and importance of serious and genuine TL as a response to the tendencies described above – because a strong and well-founded concept of this type of learning has become increasingly important to keep pace with more and more complex and constantly changing life conditions.

The result of my endeavours has been a proposal to define TL as follows: "*The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner.*" (p. 40). Of course the content of the term of "identity" is central for the understanding and value of this definition, and there are therefore also several reasons for this choice, the most important being

- that the formulation is short and clear,
- that the identity (in contrast to meaning perspectives) includes all of the three important dimensions of learning – i.e. the cognitive, the emotional, and the social (Illeris 2006),
- that only elements of central importance to the learner are included in her or his identity,
- and that the concept of identity has been discussed and described in detail in contemporary psychology and sociology.

#### *Some important implications*

In addition to this the linking of TL to the concept of identity opens for a range of new and important perspectives which may add to the understanding and practice of TL. These perspectives are discussed further and examples are given in the mentioned book and shall here just be introduced quite shortly:

TL has always and exclusively been related to adult learning. But at which age does adulthood start, how is it established, and what does this imply for the possibility of early transformative processes? The thorough psychosocial studies of identity development in youth have right back

from the work of Erik Erikson (1950, 1968) resulted in a detailed understanding of this process, which constitutes a solid basis for also discussing TL in youth. The point of departure for this is to realize that TL presupposes that there is something to transform, and thus the definition of TL in relation to identity indicates that TL becomes possible in pace with the gradual development of identity elements during youth.

TL has also always been regarded as constituting progressive processes, directed towards personal development. However, in relation to general learning theory it becomes very important to realize that learning is not always about progression and improvement. At a time when life conditions are constantly changing the individual must try to keep up with this by constant learning processes, which inevitably implies that there will also be a need for regression and restoration when existing positions become untenable or even impossible. In such situations TL plays a very central and important role, and the mastering and supporting of such regressive and restoring TL processes are perhaps the most important and challenging demands in relation to TL today.

This emphasizes that TL like other kinds of learning must be able to include and cope with learning defense and learning resistance. Neither general nor transformative learning theory have dealt much with this, but today many learning problems could be met and handled better if the role and prevalence of learning defense were acknowledged and dealt with rationally. The extensive demands of learning in contemporary schooling and education, together with the enormous amount of information we are all constantly confronted with, tend to reach beyond our learning capacity, and this is the fundamental reason why learning defense has become both an embarrassment and a necessity for everybody today and an unavoidable problem in connection with all kinds of organized learning efforts.

The linking of TL to the identity also makes it evident that such learning is involved and central in personality and competence development. This is particularly important in relation to the extensive use of the concept of competence which characterizes the legal formulations of educational authorities today. This involves that either students at all levels shall be educated to a considerably higher standard than ever before, or the concept of competence must be devaluated from the demanding and ideal position, which have been defined by the same authorities (cf. e.g. Rychen and Salganik 2003, Illeris 2009) – because this definition involves that students shall not only learn the knowledge, skills and understandings of the various subjects but also be able to command all of this in both known and new and unknown situations. This is hardly realistic if it in any way shall be aimed at, it is obvious that TL must play an important role in the learning activities as competence in practice is strongly depending on an appropriate identity development. Thus there are many dimensions in contemporary learning demands which presuppose that TL is no longer just a special and advanced kind of learning, but something in which everybody is or should be involved in order to keep up with the demands of today's everyday and working life – and that it must be understood and practised in ways which clearly includes not only the factual content learning but also the inevitable emotional and social dimensions of the identity.

### *Conclusion*

As discussed above the conclusion of this article is that the concept, practice and purpose of transformative learning should be understood, defined and maintained as providing the theoretical and practical basis for advanced learning processes involving changes in elements of the identity, which become more and more important and necessary in contemporary youth and adult education as well as in working life to keep up with the rapid development and constant changes in life and work conditions. At the same time mental support to individuals in the border area between personality psychology and psychotherapy should be left to such practices and movements as, for example, positive psychology and mindfulness (e.g. Seligman 2002, Snyder and Lopez 2002, Carr 2004, Kabat-Zinn 2005), which have a solid basis in individual and clinical psychology.

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## The Interdependency of Transformation and Failure

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*The paper suggests that many problems with the theory of transformative learning and the theory of transformative Bildung are consequence of the representational paradigm that both theories remain in. It suggests as an alternative a post-representational theory of world-disclosure where transformation is not the distinctive feature.*

One of the least disputed aspects about transformative learning seems to be the fact that there is a great variety of theories, which in themselves often use a variety of different theoretical approaches (Cranton/Taylor 2012). These heterogeneous approaches are held together by the idea that there is more than one type of learning, not only one which is often described as accumulative<sup>1</sup>, but also one that is transformative. This also applies to the contemporary German idea of “Transformative *Bildung*”.

Helmet Peukert has expressed this distinction as follows: “We have become accustomed to distinguishing two ways of learning. The one kind is more of an additive learning, i.e. in the context of a given framework of orientation and behaviour we learn more and more details that, however, do not change this basic orientation and our behaviour and our understanding of ourselves, but rather confirm them. However, in addition to this, there is also the experience that, if we really allow it to, explodes our previous ways of dealing with reality and our understanding of ourselves that exceeds our capacity to accommodate. If we wish to really take on such experiences then this requires a transformation of the fundamental structures of our behaviour and our relation to ourselves” (Peukert 2003, p. 10).

The approaches gathered beneath the “transformative concept of *Bildung*” refer to an extremely heterogeneous choice of theories. For example, Winfried Marotzki suggests in similar fashion to Mezirow (1999) with Gregory Bateson that *Bildung* should be understood as a kind of elevated learning in which not only knowledge is accumulated but also transforms the foundations of learning according to Bateson’s distinction of learning levels (Marotzki 1990). Rainer Kokemohr has, in various places, and with reference to Jacques Lacan, undertaken the suggestion to “investigate *Bildung* [...] as a process of adapting and converting those experiences that resist their subsumption under the figure of an existing model of world and self” (Kokemohr 2007, p. 21). Jenny Lüders (2007) has systematically shown how the transformative can be thought with the help of Michel Foucault. Hans-Christoph Koller has made the (empirically supported) suggestion of understanding *Bildung* in the critically reflected tradition of Humboldt, with the help of Jean-François Lyotard’s concept of dispute. Despite all the heterogeneity in the theories referred to, these approaches are bound together by the idea that processes of *Bildung* are distinguished in terms of quality from those that are commonly understood as learning processes.

In what respect this concept of “*Bildung* as transformation” corresponds to that which is described as “transformative learning” in the Anglo-Saxon world is a question that cannot be

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<sup>1</sup> “We can learn simply by adding knowledge to our meaning schemes or learning new meaning schemes with which to make interpretations about our experience”(Mezirow 1991, 223).

fully examined in this short paper. But it is both an interesting and open question as to what extent shared basic assumptions are subject to similar criticism. Two aspects come to mind: firstly, the attempt at raising the transformative to the level of a distinguishing criterion and, secondly, the way in which failure is conceptualised as a stimulus for these transformative processes and thereby denying its underlying paradoxical structure. In contrast to this concept the following should present briefly the advantages of a “general theory of world disclosure” which is based upon a paradox capable logic and suggests as an alternative distinction that between two forms of world-disclosure: experiment and exploration.

It is interesting that in both theoretical approaches (transformative learning and transformative *Bildung*) similar parallels are drawn to philosophy of science. For example both Mezirow and Koller refer to Popper and Kuhn in a similar fashion as “forerunners of transformation theory” (Mezirow 1991, 38) or examples of theories of transformative processes in the natural sciences (e.g. Koller 2007) respectively. Even though it is sometimes stressed that only limited analogies can be drawn to the natural sciences, both are attracted by the idea of falsification and learning by failure as opposed to rather positivistic ideas such as correspondence or verification. Failure, in one way or another, is seen as a trigger for a process of transformation: “Learning through meaning transformation: Encountering a problem or anomaly that cannot be resolved through neither present meaning schemes nor learning new meaning schemes so that the resolution comes through a re-definition of the problem” (Kitchenham 2008, 113)

The research on science has moved on since Popper and Kuhn and is now less interested in the question of how science should work or the question of how science can be distinguished to non-science. The research, which is often summarized under the title “Science and Technology Studies” is now much more focused on empirical studies, often based on the assumption that a clear epistemological distinction between science and nonscience cannot be made. This alone is worth mentioning as both Koller and Mezirow explicitly state that scientific research can only inform us about transformative processes of learning/*Bildung* in terms of analogies, a statement that presupposes that individual processes of learning/*Bildung* and scientific research are fundamentally different and not varieties of what can be described in the same general theoretical terms: as world-disclosure.

The general theory of world-disclosure on the other hand draws from the empirical Science and Technology Studies (in particular from Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, cf. Ahrens 2014) in terms of abstraction and respecification and is therefore based on the assumption that processes of world-disclosure can be described in such a way that their fundamental characteristics apply to both: scientific research and individual learning/*Bildung*. Both are seen as processes of world-disclosure. The theory is in this regard primarily interested in the question of how to deal with the unknown or the undisclosed, which is also the main question for those who are in the process of world-disclosure. How theories of learning are able to deal with the question of the unknown or the undisclosed seems to me the main point of distinction and closely related to important open questions and problems these theories share. I suggest that the still prevalent paradigm of representation is the main cause for these problems and especially those, which are related to the unknown/undisclosed. I only want to focus on three closely related problems. Most are already raised and can be found for example in a provocative article by Michael Newman (2012).

The most obvious question relates to the shared idea of transformation itself. The fact that transformation is used as a distinguishing criterion between the two types of learning makes it

difficult to acknowledge the transformative element in every kind of learning and leads to the question if the difference is really meant as a difference in kind or rather in degree. If the criterion is meant as in kind, does it mean that non-transformative learning is actually seen as without any transformation (which would be hard to prove)? Or, if the criterion is meant as a distinction in degree: How much transformation will then be enough? In regard to *Bildung* this problem is often addressed by stating that *Bildung* is “the transformation of fundamental figures of the relations to world and self” (Koller/Marotzki/Sanders 2007. p. 7). This of course only shifts the question to another, which is: what distinguishes the fundamental from the non-fundamental?

Another open question refers to the nature of what is transformed during a transformation process. Neither “fundamental figures of the relations to world and self” (ibid.) or “meaning perspectives” (Mezirow) are very specific and are at least challenging for empirical scrutiny. Furthermore it is interesting that it is never the world itself that is envisaged as the entity that undergoes a transformation. This is maybe the most obvious difference to a general theory of world-disclosure, in which it is always the world (as a shared one), which is transformed within a process of world-disclosure (of any kind).

This is a crucial point, because it sheds light on the underlying metaphysical distinction between the world and its perception, which is undisputed in both theoretical approaches. This is true even though in both cases much effort is put into the avoidance of the positivistic idea that the world could be accessed or perceived unmediated. Moreover: the constructivist insight that there is no unmediated access to the world is paramount for both the transformative theory of learning and the transformative theory of *Bildung*. And it is also the reason to turn to Popper, who seems to have found a way to avoid positivism with the idea of falsification. But it is this approach that is seriously questioned by more recent studies in the field of Science and Technology Studies. In a nutshell: If one takes the idea seriously that the world does not present itself unmediated and independently from the limitations of the learning subject (paradigms, meaning perspectives etc.), how is it then possible to experience something that is outside the limitations of experience? Popper and those who draw on the idea of falsification acknowledge this problem by ruling out the naive positivist empiricism of comparing one's ideas about the world with the world, while leaving at the same time the idea of failure and therefore the idea of being able to experience failure independently of the limits of experience untouched.

Mezirow stresses that no experience is without interpretation and even seems to go beyond Popper: “Popper held that all points of view are preconceived. No conscious experience, he wrote is free from interpretation. Transformation theory agrees with this but holds that experience outside of consciousness also is subject to interpretation.” (Mezirow 1991, 40). But Mezirow too does not discuss the preconditions of failure. Koller stresses in a similar strong fashion how language shapes, extends and limits our ability to experience the world and that it is nothing we could escape from. This is also the reason he reads Humboldt primarily as a philosopher of language. Others refer for example to Foucault (Lüders) to stress the fact that power relations at the same time enable and limit experiences and henceforth, are nothing we could escape from.

But what if we take the idea of the limits of experience seriously and include the experience of failure? How could one extend one's limits if even the experience of failure is not beyond them? The main question for a general theory of world-disclosure is therefore a variation of what Meno asked Socrates: “And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not

know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?”, to which Socrates answers: “I know, Meno, what you mean; but just see what a tiresome dispute you are introducing. You argue that a man cannot enquire either about that which he knows, or about that which he does not know; for if he knows, he has no need to enquire; and if not, he cannot; for he does not know the very subject about which he is to enquire” (Meno 80d-e). The question in modern terms is: How is it possible to disclose the undisclosed? And the answer I suggest and can only briefly explain here (for a more thorough argument cf. Ahrens 2014) is: Either experimental or explorational.

It is important to fully grasp the paradoxical nature of this question, which has been, as I suggest, already been at stake in both the theory of transformative learning and the theory of *Bildung* as transformation, but could not be addressed within the representational paradigm they remained in.

Within the theory of world-disclosure it will still be possible to distinguish between two fundamentally different ways of learning, or more precise two forms of world-disclosure. I will therefore not follow Newman in his suggestion to give up on a systematic distinction. But the criterion to distinguish these forms will not be that one transforms something and the other not. The difference is instead related to which side a world-disclosing process aims at: the undisclosed (more precisely: the undisclosed, which is disclosed as undisclosed) or the disclosed (more precisely: the disclosed, which is disclosed as undisclosed—as the undisclosed, which is not even disclosed as undisclosed is absent) part of the world.

The concept “world” here is not the same as the concept of “world” within the representative paradigm, where world is seen as only accessible in its representation within language, concepts or subjects, while it is at the same time (implicit and negatively) conceptualized as solid, objective and independently existing from our ideas, and as something our concepts and theories can fail at.

The concept of “world” within a general theory of world-disclosure takes into account three empirical and rarely disputed facts about the world: it is shared, it is impossible to grasp in its totality (for no subject, theory or social system) and it can be divided into a disclosed and an undisclosed part during a world-disclosing process (in relation to a world-disclosing entity: a subject, a joint effort or a social system). Instead of focusing on “world-views”, the transformation of “meaning-structures” or world and self relations, the focus here lies on the disclosure of the world—the step from not being able to experience something (undisclosed; in knowledge related terms one would call it the unknown) to being able to experience something (disclosed; or the known). “World” is conceptualized here (with reference to Husserl) as a comprehensive concept for everything that is sensually accessible (experientable) and therefore the unity of both sides the undisclosed and the disclosed in the present, and simultaneously the object of the efforts of world-disclosure.

Acquiring knowledge means within a theory of world-disclosure: gaining access to a (shared) part of the world and therefore being able to share a part of the world in terms of experience and not possessing knowledge. The idea of knowledge in this sense of know-how is therefore bound to the concept of a shared world and contradicting to both, a solipsistic concept of “one's own world” and the metaphysical concept of the world as an object opposed to a merely observing subject.



Being able to share is not necessarily meant in a harmonious way, but also in the meaning of Rancière's "disagreement": gaining access to a shared part which is not considered as a shared part in the first place. In this regard the paradox of the world is also political. As Rancière writes in his example in "disagreement" about the "contradiction of two worlds in a single world: the world where they are and the world where they are not, the world where there is something 'between' them and those who do not acknowledge them as speaking beings who count and the world where there is nothing" (Rancière 1999, 27). Mezirow for example does not address the political implications of disagreements as he conceptualizes transformative learning from the assumption of a theory that is able to differentiate between the right and the wrong: "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. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (Mezirow 2003, 58f). The theory therefore is unnecessarily put into the position of a judge who has to decide about the more appropriate world-view. What is left out by this is the challenge of a shared world and its world-immanent disagreements with the lack of a transcendental judging position beyond it.

The guiding difference in processes of world-disclosure is the difference between the disclosed and the undisclosed. In Spencer-Brown's terms (1971), to whom I refer, this difference is the form of the world for someone who discloses it and the unity of both sides is the—never present—world. Yet the sides of the difference disclosed/undisclosed are not meant as a set. In a classic, space-related concept of learning, learning is understood as a process in which an element changes sides, from the unknown to the known side of the world. The fear of a world entirely described and understood in terms and concepts of natural sciences relates to this set-theory-like understanding.

Spencer-Brown on the other hand makes it possible to handle this kind of paradoxical activity of disclosing an already fully disclosed world with the concept of the "re-entry". This is the idea of a difference copied into one side of the same difference. I am interested in the sociological interpretation of Spencer-Brown's Laws of Form following Niklas Luhmann, but with a twist: that is the deconstructive interpretation of the Laws of Form, where the difference is interpreted (or deliberately misread) as *différance* (1982). This interpretation is introduced by Urs Stäheli (2000). The crucial point here is, that it is neither possible to work on the borders of the world directly (which is to acquire knowledge about a part of the world one does not know yet), nor indirectly. During any process of world-disclosure the world undergoes a differential actualization: "The present is the future of a past that never happened." (Rheinberger 1997, 71) The border of the world (i.e. the difference between the disclosed and the undisclosed) differs/defers by its processing. This abstract, maybe counterintuitive way of describing the processes of world-disclosure is necessary to avoid the transcendental trick, which means in this context to state a transcendental difference between the world and its perception, a difference unaffected by the world-altering process of world-disclosure.

In the practice of world-disclosure the difference, the distinction between the disclosed and the undisclosed is crossed and altered by the crossing. And the distinction between exploration and experiment corresponds with the direction of the crossing: explorers are crossing the distinction to the side of the undisclosed and experimenters are crossing the distinction to the side of the disclosed—necessarily, because what it is about (and will have been the reason for the experimental process in the first place) is not even disclosed as

undisclosed and therefore absent. That does not mean that at the beginning experimenters are on the one side and thereafter on the other. As an event-driven process the difference changes in the moment of the crossing and the world is renewed in a different way. It is not like stepping across a border from one country to another. It is rather like a general step in one direction where one goes to the east, which of course does not mean that one was in the west before and is now in the east – one is still on the border between east and west, but in a different place. If one does not change the direction, the distinction between east and west will be crossed and changed with every step. And the same goes for learning: No one will ever leave the unknown part of the world behind— it is not even somewhere distant at the horizon<sup>2</sup>—it is always already right here as part of our acting-in-the-world as learners.

Considering all these differences one might draw the conclusion that a theory of transformative learning or transformative *Bildung* has not much to do with a general theory of world-disclosure. I would like to suggest the opposite: Bound to a representational paradigm, the theories of transformative learning and transformative *Bildung* were restricted to the representation of observable phenomena. Drawing from the intuitive and correct idea that there is more than just one type of learning, these theories tried to separate two forms of learning by what seemed to be the most obvious phenomenological distinction: One appears like a rather smooth accumulation of knowledge and one as rather disruptive and “transformative”. That mainly experimental processes of world-disclosure often appear as disruptive or transformative can now be explained by the interplay of many characteristics (the difference between experiment and exploration is described by twenty one characteristics in Ahrens 2014). Transformation is a fair description of the impression an observer of a mainly experimental process of world-disclosure might get—but by no means an appropriate description of the form itself as it is part of a representational vocabulary. Processes of world-disclosure do not transform world-views, meaning-perspectives, world and self relations or even the world itself, they replace one world with another.

The most typical example for an explorer may be Christoph Columbus. In 1492 the world Columbus lived in was shaped by the difference of the known and the unknown;<sup>3</sup> Europe, Africa and Asia as the known part of the world and the west-way to India for example was part of the world as an unknown. The unknown existence of a passage to India by going to the west, was of course present in this past. And therefore Columbus was an explorer: He aimed to the known unknown. The whole continent of America on the other hand was not even known as an unknown, it was beyond the world of the European. But after the discovery it was already and it has always been part of the world. The past perfect tense and future perfect enable us to put this process into words. Epistemologists do not need to fear constructivism: Columbus did not “invent” America. It has always been there, a solid, real part of the world. In our present history there is no such thing as a world without America. The process of world-disclosure is therefore not thinkable in terms of set-theory because both sides of the world-shaping difference are changing. Since the day Columbus realized he set a foot on America another continent was added to the disclosed part of the world. But at the same time another continent was also added to the undisclosed part of the world. This is the reason to treat the problem of world-disclosure in this abstract way – to speak about “altering the difference between the known and the unknown” instead of using the very misleading

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<sup>2</sup> The metaphor of the horizon might have been one of the main hindrances of the development of a post-representational theory of learning.

<sup>3</sup> It might be easier to follow the example here using the terms known/unknown instead of the more precise terms disclosed/undisclosed.

expressions of “learning something” or transforming world and self relations. And it is also obvious that the difference between experiment and exploration is a difference that can only be related to the aim of the world-disclosing practice and not to the outcome (serendipities may be the outcome of explorations as well as experiments).

To give also a brief example of an experimental process with three of the twenty one characteristics that distinguishes it from an explorational process I like to turn to the botanist Robert Brown, who unintentionally became an experimenter. He discovered what we today call the Brownian Motion: The seemingly random movement of particles suspended in a fluid, being pushed around by smaller particles, we know now as molecules. Brown's experiment began with a mere technical problem, a problem everyone in the field of botany was struggling with: how to isolate the objects of examination against disturbances from the outside. Something small as pollen cannot be put directly under the microscope but must be placed onto a small piece of glass in liquid. And the problem for Brown and his colleagues was that the pollen refused to stop moving around, regardless of the methods botanists tried to isolate them. In the world before 1827 scientists knew that they did not know enough to isolate the pollen or, and this was another explanation: They knew that they did not know if the particles were moving simply by themselves because as parts of plants, and therefore living entities they were seen as capable of moving. Brown however tried harder through many attempts to isolate his microscope from any disturbances. During these series of attempts to solve this seemingly mere technical problem he became slowly suspicious about the idea that it was even possible to isolate them well enough to stop the pollen from moving. So he concentrated on the assumption that they were moving around by themselves, which of course had to mean for him, that the pollen still had life in them. His interest had already shifted as a direct consequence of his involvement in a non-intentional constructed experimental set-up and led later to the idea of molecules as a new explanation.

We tend to think about science in terms of discovery and observation. But this applies only to the explorational side of the truth. The title of Brown's published article goes like this: “A Brief Account of Microscopical Observations Made in the Months of June, July, and August, 1827, on the particles Contained in the Pollen of Plants; and on the General Existence of Active Molecules“. To understand the difference between a simple observation and this process, during which he learned to see the same things differently means to understand the difference between exploration and experiment.

Brown did not start with a definite question lacking an answer nor did he experience the failure of his assumptions. His problem was rather the multitude of possible explanations. He thought he had the answer right before his very eyes: The particles are either still alive and moving around by themselves or they are not thoroughly shielded from outside influences. These assumptions are very sound for someone who lived the last 54 years in a world where creatures usually stop moving by themselves when they die. In this regard an experiment is not an instrument for proving an idea right or wrong (Popper was right in his opposition against verification, but he was wrong in not opposing falsification as well). Brown did not start with the idea “Dead things can move around by themselves” nor did he experience the failure of his assumption that they do not. World-disclosure makes experiences possible that were not possible before. What Brown's experience is about is that we are sharing the world with moving atoms and not just in the sense of side by side, but as an integral part of everyday life. It is due to Brown's experiment that we know today that the fundamentals of our world are in a constant unrest, just as they are in a world-disclosing process.

If this process is described as a process of transformation, it would not explain much. On the contrary, it would obscure the differences between the two forms of world-disclosure and underestimate the efforts needed to make failure possible. While exploration aims at the (disclosed) undisclosed, experiments on the other hand aim necessarily at the disclosed (this is the repetition/iteration of what is already completely disclosed) for that, which is to be disclosed is absent and beyond experience. Columbus could aim *intentionally* at the west-passage to India, Brown depended on the *intuition* that builds up during the process. Columbus' journey was primarily *spacial* (and the metaphor of the horizon might fit here in a certain way), whereas Brown's insight was born mainly in *time* (it is about the differences between before and after, not here and there). One *increases* the number of experiences, the other *limits* the number of possible explanations by isolating the system, ideally to zero. The impossibility of a given situation, being confronted with an unexplainable experience, is the precondition in an experimental setting for the possibility to come up with something new. Popper was never interested in how scientists invent new ideas and therefore mistook the experiment as secondary to the theoretical work, instead of realizing that it is the very generator of new ideas. Columbus and Brown are of course only illustrative figures and not meant as actual examples of people who embody forms of world-disclosure. World-disclosure is a process in which humans only play a part with those entities they share the world with. They might seem to intentionally lead the process (especially in explorational settings), but (especially in experimental settings) most often a world-disclosing process is only successful because the world-disclosing subject manages to decentralize itself and let itself be led by the dynamics of the system itself.

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**Learning and transformation:  
are we not transformed a little, every time we learn?**

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**Introduction**

I would like to begin this paper with a personal experience: a year ago, I was diagnosed with a rare idiopathic disease which fortunately is not threatening for my life. However, the moment I was announced the diagnosis; I experienced what I clearly understand as a biographical disjuncture (Jarvis, 2009). At that time it was obvious that my biographical repertoire was no longer sufficient to cope with the new situation of my life. To put it simply the facts were now different. My concept of being healthy, which indeed played a central role in my life, had received a severe shock. I was not healthy any more, at least according to the assumptions about health that I had up to that time. But I did not wanted to be sick and thus I was confronted with an interesting dilemma, a personal disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 2000), for which I had to do something about it. In the months that followed the diagnosis, I went through an extensive study of resources regarding my disease. I searched papers, I critically reviewed many medical articles using my mathematical skills, I tried to change the way I live, my diet, my work schedule, and my relationships with others. I looked for spiritual empowerment, I tried to understand myself better, I looked into my soul and I tried to see what was happening. And to quote my favourite rock group: *“I still have not found what I am looking for”* (U2, 1987).

All these happened in order for me to learn to live in my new conditions. I had to adjust. This whole process was and still is a learning process, an enlightening learning process that resulted in a number of changes. Some changes were more instrumental, for example, adapting to a new diet, and other changes were more liberating as the search for sources of psychological disengagement. All this was, and to my opinion, continues to be a learning process that generated some epistemological questions. What kind of learning is this? Is this an example of transformative learning? Starting from these questions a set of new and more general questions was generated in my mind: Is learning a definable process? Is there a non-transformative learning process? What do we really mean by transformation?

Most probably, these fundamental questions need a lot of discussion and a very deep and thorough examination. However, in this paper I will share my thoughts, trying to answer them up to a certain level and generate a further discussion about them. My effort is apparently not in opposition to the theory of transformative learning. On the contrary, I do support the idea of fostering transformative learning, especially in educational settings, merely because I think that all learning is transformative.

**Is it possible to define learning?**

This question seems simple, but it is not. Sometimes, however, it generates simple answers. For example, I do believe that if we address this question to teaching professionals, we will get the immediate response that learning is the result of an educational process. This is an answer which is obviously not wrong, and which for many years was indeed the expected answer (Illeris, 2007, Jarvis, 2009). This answer has deep cultural roots and the connection of learning almost exclusively with what is happening in educational settings is not a strange phenomenon because *“the power of human learning in especially evident in educational*

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to express thanks to Prof. Peter Jarvis for being my teacher and my good friend for almost 20 years now, but also for his constructive and inspiring comments during the period that I was trying to express in writing my thoughts.

*settings*” (Schunk, 2008, p. 1), In my country (Greece) for example if we search the most reliable Greek dictionary, the Dictionary of Common Modern Greek, published by the Manolis Triantafyllidis Foundation, we will find that learning is laconically defined as *“the acquisition of knowledge”*. (p. 813) On the other hand, looking into a less formal source of information, the Greek version of Wikipedia, we see that learning is defined as the *“process in which the subject acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes and values through cognitive processes.”* (see, <http://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/Μάθηση>). Both these definitions seem very limited straight by the fact that they both endorse only the cognitive dimension of the learning process. This dimension is mostly related to schooling of any level. But learning is by far a more complicated phenomenon.

Knud Illeris, the well-known Danish scholar, in all his extensive work on learning he is recognizing the complexity of the process. It is this complexity that, to my understanding, led him to use a definition about learning which is really broad. According to Illeris (2007, p. 3) learning is *“any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing”*. Through this intentionally broad but apocalyptic definition, Illeris is recognizing that learning is in a straight line connected with capacity change. But capacity change and the consequential development is a human condition. Throughout our lives we evolve, we change and we achieve or do not achieve developmental goals. The ability for capacity change is a dimension of our own existence and the key explanation for our survival. Illeris, sees learning broadly and I think that this is really brilliant. If we wish to discuss learning then the discussion has to be open. I realized that even more when I was translating a book on learning where I had to deal with the views and ideas of sixteen learning theorists (Illeris, 2009). As I was translating every single chapter from English to Greek, I found myself in partial agreement with every single author. In every chapter, I was able to find a sufficient explanation about the learning process. What was wrong with me? Is it possible to agree with all learning theorists? Well, maybe it is. Returning, to the issue of existence, maybe it is possible to agree with all learning theorists, simply because learning and being are interconnected. Whether learning is cumulative (Gagné, 1985), assimilative and accommodative (Piaget, 1952), significant (Rogers, 1951), expansive (Engeström, 1987), biographical (Alheit, 2009), situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991), single-looped or double-looped (Argyris & Schön, 1974), experiential (Kolb, 1984), transitional (Wildermersch & Stroobants, 2009) or transformative (Mezirow, 2000), learning is above and beyond anything else, existential. It is connected with our human existence. Humans are learning animals. Learning is related to our development, our evolution; learning is part of living itself. Or to put it in other words, my learning is me and I am my learning.

### **Is it possible to have any kind of learning without some type of transformation?**

We have to recognize that beyond schooling, education and training or however we call any organised, guided form of transferring knowledge, skills and habits, there are many other learning processes in our lives. Learning is related to the way each person from the first moments of his/her existence, experiences and perceives the world around him/her. This personal process of responding to the various social stimuli is realized through cognitive processes (e.g. critical thinking), through conscious actions but also through the emotions that are usually not considered as factors that create or recreate learning, although there is an extensive recognition that there is intelligence connected with them (Goleman, 1998, Gardner, 1999). So, in what ways are we responding to all these social stimuli or to our being and living conditions? To answer this question I will turn to Peter Jarvis who has committed most of his research and academic career seeking to answer the question of learning (e.g. Jarvis, 2007, 2009 and 2012). In one of his recent works that is dedicated to the colossal task



of describing the human learning process, he refers to several of these ways (Jarvis, 2009). I will mention just a few of them; those that I believe support my argument: internalisation, mimesis and adaptation.

When we interact with our physical or social environment we internalise through our visual and auditory senses by listening and reading. This is a form of conscious communication with the external world and as any other type of communication it is subject to distortions, so there may be questions about what it is actually internalized during a learning episode of this kind (Jarvis, 2009). Nevertheless, in the internalization process we also have unconscious learning or learning that happens before we are aware of the very phenomenon of learning. I remember when my wife was pregnant; the doctor was very supportive of the idea to play classical music in the house. And she had a point. There are plenty of published studies arguing that when pregnant women are exposed to music, this exposure significantly influences the foetal behaviour but also the behaviour of the newborn children (e.g. Arabin, 2002, Al-Qahtani, 2005, Arya et al., 2012). Thus, exposure to music during pregnancy is a learning process that influences the future behaviour of a human being or in other words, a process that initiates change. Isn't this learning, that transforms?

Mimesis or imitation is another learning process. This is a well-known form of learning that is considered "*crucial to human development*" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 26). We see imitation frequently but it is true that we see it most often in babies and young children and this significant learning process is recognised as the way in which they try to enter the adult world and become socialized. Imitation is a form of learning that goes far beyond a simple replication of behaviour (Atherton, 2013). It seems that it is something much more important, which is associated with one of our basic instincts that of belonging. And it happens also in the adulthood. I will again use an example from my own biography. English is my second language. I really enjoy the English language and I try to speak it with as few mistakes as possible. The interesting issue is my pronunciation. It is not stable. It changes. When I am with English friends, I can hear my self speaking English but when I am with American friends, I hear my self speaking American-English and when I am with friends of other nationalities that speak English, I hear my self speaking Greek-English. And I am pretty sure that if I spend a significant time period in Ireland, I will change my spoken English to Irish-English. What am I doing? I am simply imitating to become accepted or to move from the periphery of the social group that I temporarily belong to its centre. It is apparent that imitation is a learning process that has the power to generate change (Illeris, 2007, Jarvis 2009). And in some cases this change is not only a trivial change like the one I presented above but it can be a change in the way I think, I act and I live. So imitation is another learning path that may lead to transformation.

Finally, I would like to look into adaptation, a learning process which I consider as the most significant in human life. Adaptation seems to be the simplest response to stimuli of our social environment but it is vital and to my understanding it may occur in two ways. There is adaptation which relates to the process of evolution that is unconscious but there is also conscious adaptation, which happens when we understand exactly what is happening around us and we decide to adjust our behaviour and our attitudes to the environment. Conscious adaptation is a learning process that in some cases relates to the conscious perspective transformation which is described by Mezirow (1991). But there are circumstances that we adapt to our environment unconsciously, we change dramatically our way of life either for a shorter or for a longer period. Again, I would like to share an example: I have a friend from high school who for personal reasons at some point he entered the monastic life. He became a monk for eight years, he lived in a unique way for a long period and then he decided to return to the secular world. Today he is married and he is a happy father. When I asked him how did he managed to confront these profound changes he answered, "*I adapted the environment*".

This is a simple answer for a complex question. In every new social environment he was introduced, his adaptation period was a learning process. Wasn't that learning process transformative? I think it was.

In the paragraphs above, I presented briefly learning processes that may lead to change and transformation. I just presented three different processes, while we all recognize that learning happens in many more ways. Every learning process that we go through changes something in ourselves since every learning episode that we participate is helping us to answer a disjuncture or a dilemma that occurs in our biography (Mezirow, 1991, Jarvis, 2009). So is it possible to have learning without some kind of transformation? If we consider the learning processes and the examples that I shared then I have to think that the answer in this question is negative. However, before I continue with my concluding thoughts, I would like to look also into the concept of transformation.

### **What do we mean by transformation?**

Through my short presentation so far it is quite obvious that the definition of learning is not an easy task. Learning is broad and since it is broad it is difficult to illustrate it. I also presented some learning processes that are not conscious but still they lead to change and transformation. But let's turn our sight to the issue of transformation and to the meaning of it in relation to learning. Looking into the literature of transformative learning it is apparent that there is a variation in terms and meanings regarding the very issue of transformation (e.g. O'Sullivan, 1999, Dirkx, 2000). I will not analyze in this paper, the different terms and their significance and usage. Even if a different adjective is used (e.g. transformational) again this is not a very big issue. Whether learning is described as transformative or transformational is not a big problem, although in some cultural contexts it may create misunderstandings especially when translation is involved. I would like however, to discuss briefly the notion of transformation.

Naturally I will refer to Jack Mezirow because as Kegan (2000, p. 47) has pointed "*Jack Mezirow's genius*" has provided the adult education community with a concept that gave the opportunity for the field to take off. For Mezirow, the transformational result of a learning process occurs when "*...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 generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action*" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 76). This definition of transformation is the outcome of Mezirow's extensive research on adult learning and thus it is quite natural to be very comprehensive and functional. I was very lucky to meet, interview and discuss with Prof. Mezirow and to translate one of his books in Greek and from these experiences I think that I have a good idea, to a certain level, about his personal view on adult education and its consequent learning. For Mezirow:

*Adult education should assist people to learn how to think clearly and critically. How to be critical against all the assumptions that they have taken for granted. They should be able to identify the limits in the views of the other people and of course the limitations of their own opinions*

(Koulaouzides & Andritsakou, 2007, p.7)

Moreover, in his writings, Mezirow mentions that learning is the "*...process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action*" (Mezirow, 1991, p.12). If we combine all the above we may conclude that the core of Mezirow's view on transformative learning includes an epistemological change or to state it differently, a conscious change in the way we know and learn.

It is true that by accepting the aforementioned for the transformation learning process, adult educators have to accept an additional task. They have to help their learners first and foremost to recognize their existing epistemological framework so that when they will later transform it, they will become conscious of the change. Only then it is possible for them to declare that they have been transformed and thus it is possible for adult educators to record this change and present it as the achieved outcome of their transformative teaching effort. However, beyond the fact that this task is very demanding, my concern is that the perspective transformation that Mezirow is describing is a conscious change in meaning or perspectives. While I do recognize and acknowledge the importance of such a change, as I have mentioned before there are learning processes that lead to meaning transformation unconsciously (e.g. the adaptation process) or they are initiated not by a cognitive processes but through complicated emotional development (e.g. the religious learning process of conversion). Should we not consider these learning processes as transformative? I think that we should. I suppose that similar questions led learning researchers and practitioners to examine the transformative learning rhetoric. This inquiry had various outcomes. The views that were articulated were in some cases not so accommodating for our field of practice (e.g. Newman, 2012) and in other cases very constructive (e.g. Illeris 2013). I will use the constructive ones to continue my inquiry. Looking at transformation from a psychological viewpoint and after a through analysis of issues that relate to the concept of identity, Illeris (2013) introduced a redefinition of transformative learning. He stated that *“the concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner”* (p. 40). Once again Illeris has provided us with a broad definition and again I think that he did the right thing, since transformation is as complicated as learning. Nevertheless, from this new definition it is concluded that transformation occurs after every learning process, conscious and unconscious, that results to an identity change of the learner. Identity is created, developed and changed through learning (ibid, p.69). At this point I believe that we have to think again about what is learning. This time, I will draw on the existential view of learning as it was described by Jarvis (2009), who states that learning is:

*The combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, meaning, beliefs and senses) – experiences natural and social situations, the content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person.*

(Jarvis, 2009, p.25)

Now if I consider Illeris's redefinition of transformation and Jarvis's definition of learning I am allowed to assume that since transformation is about changes in our identity and since these changes are lifelong, lifewide and continuous as a result of a complex combination of conscious and unconscious learning processes, then all my learning throughout my life is transformative or that we are transformed a little, every time we learn.

### **Concluding thoughts**

I started this paper with a personal experience. My personal biographical disjuncture was the beginning of a learning trip that I consider transformative. Based on this subjective experience I presented thoughts and arguments about the transformative nature of all human learning processes. My intention is not to deconstruct the theory of transformation. On the contrary, I believe that learning is transformative because it is existential. In my opinion, in every learning episode there is a movement from an imaginary mental position, where we are

temporarily situated due to the sensuous experience of a biographical disharmony, towards reality. This movement which is continuous, allows us to solve biographical conflicts and to continue our life. Thus, it is my belief that since every human learning process has by nature transformative potential, adult educators as learning mediators have the obligation to employ tools and methods that can strengthen the inherent outcome of learning: transformation.

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## **‘Love actually’: Transformative Learning meets Bildung, and the psychosocial concept of recognition**

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### **Introduction: the heart of the matter**

In this chapter, I seek to develop a more nuanced as well as deeper understanding of processes of transformative learning (TL) and of the associated idea of agentic selfhood; and to relate these, in turn, to the concept of Bildung. To build, that is, understanding of TL beyond its reification as an uncomplicated good, or as a marketing slogan beloved of educational institutions. Or in fact as an overly individualistic, cognitive process that often dominates the literature. I draw on auto/biographical narrative research, undertaken over many years, which, I believe, helps challenge an emphasis on a disembodied, decontexted cognition, and an associated neglect of the whole people experiencing transformational learning. This is a problem in both European understanding of transformative processes as well as in the North American literature (Illeris, 2013). The problem, in North America, reaches back, in part, to Mezirow: TL for him involved a radical shift in mind-set, or epistemic framing of the world, following disorientating dilemmas, like divorce or a lost job. Any mind-set, of course, as Mezirow readily acknowledged, is also entwined with values, beliefs, feelings and changing relationships but transformation, at core, crystallises around shifts in epistemic assumptions. Celia Hunt (2013), in fact, detects movement, over time, in Mezirow's position, with less attention given to processes of psychological or relational change, including unconscious, in favour of what can in effect be an isolated cognitive functioning. Cognition is clearly important, maybe crucial, but there is far more to it than that. A psychosocial theory of recognition, by significant others, and in particular kinds of groups, and the wider culture; and of self, in relation to the symbolic world, lies at the heart of this chapter, as an alternative, more holistic perspective.

Of course, predominantly cognitivist, rationalist understanding of transformation in education has echoes in the idea of Bildung and the wider Enlightenment project. We note, for instance, in the Kantian view of education, that critical engagement with the world requires the cultivation of a kind of transcendental reason. For Kant, this was central to challenging tradition and narrow, dogmatic as well as traditional views of the world (Gaitanidas, 2012). The education of the intellect, in other words, was central to nurturing the more self-determining life: for breaking free of the shackles of convention, received wisdom and narrow parochialism. Educational and philosophical thinking, following Descartes, continues to split mind from body and transcendence is seen to lie in a sort of escape from our animal, corporeal base. The body and feeling become a problem, something to be transcended in struggles to break free and think more rationally. This deep suspicion of body and feeling and a neglect of subjectivity – and how we might theorise this beyond essentialist understanding - are embedded, paradigmatically, in our sense making about education (Illeris, 2013). This is a major problem when considering complex stories of transformation – fictional or actual - as Kegan (2000) attempts with characters like Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, as well as specific learner narratives. Greater self-determination, in this perspective, involves such anxiety ridden, ambivalent, wrenching of self from established cultures or ways of seeing. We might posit instead, in considering transformations, shifts in the experience of self in the world, encompassing psychological, embodied and socio-cultural as well as symbolic dimensions, at one and the same time. A theory of recognition, drawing on psychoanalysis

and critical theory, and developed through intensive engagement with the complexity of learners' narratives, can assist us in the task.

### **Bildung and *hablbildung***

The education of the intellect lay, as noted, at the heart of *Bildung*. It offered release from chains of dogma and superstition. Enlightenment thought aimed to replace the judgement of experience with reasoned judgement and the task was assigned to a transformative, comprehensive education, or *Bildung*. The nurturing of rational judgement was entwined with the cultivation of individuals into more self-determining persons. However, following Kant, processes of self-determination tended to neglect emotion and relationship. However, Von Humbolt (2000 [1793–1794]), opened up a whole set of issues in suggesting that *Bildung* had to do with linking the student's self to the world in the “most general, most animated and most unrestrained interplay” (Gaitanidas, 2012). We need to consider more of what such animated interplay might involve, and how to theorise it.

Interestingly, in both North American TL and European traditions there is a desire to distinguish TL or transformation, from the banking and transmission models of education. In one version of this, in the European tradition, there is a desire to challenge what Adorno (1998) termed *Halbbildung*, or “half-education”, which can be associated with the banking concept. This, he perceived, produces, as in much conventional education, compliance rather than questioning, and assimilation into existing cultural and social norms: as distinct from any questioning of them (especially when these may be oppressive, viewed through the lens of gender, race or class etc.). Half-education is what remains when the conditions of autonomy inherent in the liberal ideal, or *Bildung*, are discarded and integration and conformity come to the fore. Such ‘education’ provides learners with sets of presumptions filtering their actual existence and experience, and offering them a way of dealing with anxieties surrounding experience by smoothing over contradictions and tensions. Students can become convinced, more or less, that existing social structures are natural, and will never change, in what becomes a thoughtless adaptation to the world. This might be a condition where it is difficult to think outside an authoritarian or neo-liberal mind set (Gaitanidas, 2012). There is common ground here between aspects of TL and European traditions: Stephen Brookfield, (2000), for instance, straddles European and North American thought, bringing critical theory into the literature of TL. Brookfield's idea of transformation has to do with some radical interrogation of ideologies that may constrain, individually and collectively. Interesting, this is a process that penetrates deep into the heart of psychic functioning and of the most intimate of experience too, as Brookfield's' own story of an omnipotent and ultimately self-defeating masculinity testifies (Brookfield, 2011).

So I want to chronicle and theorise processes of transformation in more holistic ways. John Dirkx, among others, (Dirkx, Mezirow and Cranton, 2006), has also sought to take understanding into deeper territory of searches for meaning, even for self and new kinds of individuation. I follow a related path, but draw on different kinds of psychoanalytic ideas, (object relations), and combine these with critical theory. I suggest that transformation, of any meaningful kind, is a process at once relational, intersubjective, intimate as well as social in nature, with a changing sense of self in relation at its core.

### **Recognition**

The concept of recognition is helpful here. The concept, for present purposes, makes use of psychoanalytic object relations, and the interplay of inner and outer dynamics. Donald Winnicott (1971) meticulously observed the qualities of relationship in which infants are

embedded and the interplay of objective and subjective worlds, self and other, in transformative processes in early life. He was initially concerned with how a child psychologically separates from a prime caregiver, in healthy ways, moving, developmentally, towards greater individuation and openness to experience. He placed the capacity for play and creativity, within the context of relationship, at the core of healthy progression, where a child can let go of anxiety and absorb herself in the moment, rather than being unduly preoccupied with what a prime caregiver may be doing. Winnicott argued that early experiences of recognition provide templates for life: good enough early relationships, in which the putative self feels loved and secure, offer a means simply to be, and a sense of the world as satisfying, where desire can be expressed in relatively straightforward ways. On the other hand, less satisfactory relationships, and the anxieties these provoke, may evoke more false or compliant responses: a need to appease or please, takes over, for fear, for instance, of not being good enough or acceptable in the eyes of the other. An obsession may develop around the need to please others and of doing and saying what they might want: such patterns can find later expression in education, in relationships with teachers and professors, for instance (West, 1996). Notwithstanding, we may find in our quality of interactions with significant others, in later life, the feeling of being understood, listened to as well as challenged; and we may, in the responses of others, feel more legitimate in what we are seeking to do.

Winnicott's (1971) concept of transitional space, and the role of play and creativity within such spaces, is helpful in understanding significant change processes among, for example, young parents participating in family 'support' programmes like Sure Start (derived from the American Head Start programme) (West, 2009); or among learners in higher education (West, Finnegan and Fletcher, 2013). Such programmes might offer qualities of space, and interaction, which facilitate a kind of narrative experiment of self and identity (West, 1996). In this perspective, the intersubjective – what happens between people, and changing qualities of interaction – affecting the stories people tell of self and others, can, over time, become internalised and shift internal or intrasubjective dynamics. New qualities of relationship 'out there', in which people feel recognised, understood and valued, (informed by clinical understanding), are introjected, to use a psychoanalytic term, creating more life enhancing psychic dynamics: among young single mothers weighed down by negative stereotyping, for instance (West, 2009). Such changing qualities have been chronicled, narratively, longitudinally, and in fine-grained detail (West, 1996; 2009; Merrill and West, 2009). Storytelling and meaning making, encompassing new qualities of thinking and feeling, are central to shifts in the self's relationship to the world as well in the internal psychic drama.

Winnicott (1971) clearly understood that such ideas could be applied to adult development; and particular writers have used his concept of transitional space, for instance, when thinking of storytelling, or meaning making, as a kind of transitional even transformational activity, a process of self negotiation, more or less productive of selfhood (Sclater, 2004). We might think of university as a space where a self is in negotiation, and where struggles around separation and individuation - letting go of past ideas and relationships – take place. Like the child, the adult, or rather the infant and child in the adult, might be riddled with anxiety about her capacity to cope, and or whether s/he can be good enough in the eyes of significant others. S/he may cling to an existing identity or idea, and or be overly preoccupied with what others think, which can denude experience of emotional vibrancy. Learning may feel deadened in consequence. The stories people tell – to tutors, instructors and even researchers



– may, on the other hand, serve as vehicles for renegotiation of self, for a kind of narrative experiment in the company of others.

We can feel recognised, in short, connecting us to Axel Honneth's writings and to critical theory. Recognition, in his view, is simultaneously an individual as well as wider socio-cultural phenomenon. It requires love in the family or interpersonal sphere in order for the child (or I will add adult) to develop basic self-confidence. Recognition of the autonomous person, bearing rights in law, provides, in turn, a basis for self-respect, in a broader social frame. And the formation of a co-operative member of society whose efforts are socially valued and important can lead to what he terms self-esteem (Honneth, 2007). Honneth was deeply influenced by the object relations theories of Donald Winnicott as well as by Freud's 'anthropological' idea, in which, compared to other mammals, humans are born prematurely, with important consequences. They, we, are deeply dependent on others for survival: vulnerability, in these terms, is hardwired within us. Letting go and experimenting is always and inevitably anxiety provoking because of this deeply embodied fear of not being able to cope or being found wanting (Honneth, 2009). In Honneth's schema, the first form of relating he terms self-confidence: Winnicott would have termed this an experience of selfhood. If one experiences love, an ability to love one's self and others, is developed. An identity (or selfhood) is forged through receiving recognition from others. Without such a special relationship with another, it is impossible to become aware of one's own uniqueness and thus experience a basic and positive sense of one's abilities. Only by being recognized can we achieve a vibrant identity (Fleming, 2010). This is Winnicott's territory of the truer or more authentic self, forged in relationship.

The second type of relationship to self, for Honneth, has to do with cultivating self-respect, when a person belongs to a community of rights and is recognized as a legally mature person. Through this comes an ability to participate in discussions and the rituals of an institution or group. Respect may then be shown to others by acknowledging their rights. Without rights there is no social respect, to put it slightly differently. It is not just having a good opinion of self but of possessing a kind of shared dignity of persons as morally responsible agents and capable of participating in public deliberations. The experience of being honoured by a community for contributions leads to the third form of self-relation which Honneth labels self-esteem. People with high self-esteem will reciprocate a mutual acknowledgement of each other's contribution to the community. From this, crucially, loyalty and more inclusive, even sustainable forms of social solidarity can grow (Fleming, 2011; Honneth, 2007: 139).

In a recent article (West, Fleming and Finnegan, 2013) note was made of how Honneth (2007, 2009) re-visited Freud's work and critiqued a contemporary trend to move away from any imperative to understand ourselves by reference to a deep engagement with our past. He proposes, instead, that psychoanalysis makes an important link between freedom and biographical work (Honneth, 2009, pp. 126-156). Autobiographical work involves an ability through reflexive activity to overcome 'the rupturedness of each individual' and 'only by a critical appropriation of her own process of formation does the human seize the opportunity provided to her for freedom of will' (p. 127). In asking how freedom is attainable at all, Honneth asserts that we can re-appropriate our own will by means of recollective work. For Freud, according to Honneth, the individual is 'less a self-interpreting being than one who critically scrutinizes its own past to see whether traces of compulsions that have remained unconscious can be found in it' (2009, p. 139). As the desire for freedom resides within, we can turn to our life-histories as valid expressions of the possibilities and constraints of our humanity. In his remarkable departure from Marxism in general and most of early critical

theory, and even, to some extent, from Habermas, Honneth attempts to reimagine the emancipatory project of critical social theory grounded in intersubjective dynamics; in the “struggle for recognition” (West, Fleming and Finnegan, 2013).

Crucially, note should be made of Honneth's distinction, drawing on John Dewey, between good and bad social relations, and affiliations, in the development of qualities of recognition (Honneth, 2007). He notes how joining a quasi-militaristic group can be a way of finding recognition, of a kind. Social esteem and recognition, he writes – drawing on the Nazi period – is to be found in groups where the code of honour is dominated by notions of justified violence. Self-confidence, respect and esteem, to an extent, are cultivated, yet a group may close itself off from wider cultural and democratic life. Turning to groups like these can bring feelings of belonging, of recognition, and even of having divine purpose, in the struggle to create a perfect, purified world (Vavin, 2012). Yet such affiliations, in their rigid exclusions, and destructive grandiosity, easily close down possibilities for dialogue with and learning from others. Honneth draws on the work of John Dewey to explain this (Honneth, 2007: 227-278). Dewey used the example of a robber band to indicate how particular groups constrain as well as recognise. The individual becomes a member but at the cost of repression of diverse possibilities. ‘The good citizen’, Dewey observed, requires more democratic and open communities to realise what s/he might be: s/he finds him or herself by full participation in family life, in the economy, in diverse artistic, cultural and political activities, in which there is free give and take. Such a perspective can be applied to processes of learner transformation in educational groups, both formal and informal.

#### **Recognition: two cases in point**

I have undertaken auto/biographical narrative research, over many years, among diverse groups of learners involved in managing change and disorientating dilemmas. I suggest that people, in effect, are striving to re-negotiate selves and stories in new qualities of relationship, not least with themselves but also the symbolic order. Symbols matter, especially when these interact with and illuminate our experiences in new and positive ways: the symbolic encompasses art, music and or sculpting as well as literature. Such insights have emerged in a particular kind of longitudinal auto/biographical narrative research: in care-full, empathic, respectful yet also reflexive work, in a ‘clinical style’, mirroring, to an extent, processes of psychoanalysis; yet also being mindful of the importance of distinguishing one from the other, and maintaining appropriate boundaries (Bainbridge and West, 2012; Merrill and West, 2009). People, over time, (and research might last upwards of 4 years) can find new narrative, symbolic, emotional and human resources, or ‘objects’ in psychoanalytic language, in educational and other settings. In such research, learners are encouraged to tell stories, over time, as openly and honestly as they can. And to engage reflexively with their material, using transcripts and recordings, to identify themes and to think about them and the process with the researcher. Emphasis is given in the research relationship to attentiveness and respectfulness as well as to taking time to build trust and mutual understanding. There is focus on the emotional qualities of the interaction between researcher and her subject, as part of making sense of narrative material, (thus the juxtaposition of auto/biographical as a co-constructed or relational endeavour) (Merrill & West, 2009; Bainbridge & West, 2012). Moreover, because of the longitudinal nature of the process – assuming relationships are good enough – we can think together about what is difficult to say and or may be missing from the account.

Such research reveals how new objects – a different narrative, a piece of art, the struggles of a character from literature with whom we might identify – become recognised as important and can be psychologically internalised through a process we may call projective identification.

Learners may also find people – teachers, other students etc. - who value them, in new ways, and whose views, achievements and recognition, are important. They may find characters in literature with whom they identify: like Nora in *A Doll's House*, whose struggles can be related to their own; 's/he is like me, I know this struggle; it is mine too' the learner might recite to herself. 'Gina's' case study material takes us to the heart of such transitional as well as transformational processes. She was a young single parent living in East London, in a community struggling with material poverty and inter-generational unemployment. Her past was riddled with patterns of pain, rejection and hard drugs. She could be deeply self-deprecating, having internalized many of the negative judgments about people like her – a single parent, on welfare benefits etc. – from the wider culture. Gina participated in a parenting project which used the visual arts to build confidence among her and other single mothers to express themselves and to think about who they were, had been, and might be, in new ways. Gina participated in a series of workshops called '*Cotton on*', which used sculpture, printing, photography and video to explore pregnancy and parenthood. Narrative interviews were held across a number of cycles. Gina worked on a sculpture, over time, and told stories of moving from the edge of the project, into a more heartfelt engagement: from acting out and dismissiveness, to greater capacity for play and asking questions of herself and what she really desired. She came to realise, over time, that she was telling new stories about painful aspects of her life history, including her relationship with her own child, that she had been barely able to acknowledge. She was to find the process transformational, albeit perpetually fragile.

Pregnancy had been hard and troubling, and she felt, at times, unreal since she didn't look pregnant. She was depressed and '*really ill throughout*'. Her mood was projected into the sculpture. She was trying, she said, '*to get across that, the darkness.*' There was no head on the sculpture, either; it was a headless torso, which, she said, was deliberate, because she didn't want to think. She found, she said, sculpting to be therapeutic and a source of reflection. She had been deeply anxious about participating in the project and wanted, at times, to run away. In fact, the project, like other forms of adult learning, provided precious transitional space in which to play, imaginatively, with new forms of self-expression. Her anxiety about letting go and risk taking were 'contained' by skilled tutors with psychological resilience and insight. They remained alongside her, despite what Gina knew to be her hateful and destructive actions, helping her to think about what she did and why (West, 2009). We can call this love, actually, in a non-sexual, sophisticated, containing and quiet way, which seeks some contentment and resolution in another's life (Main, 1978). A transitional space was created, mirroring what is required in early separation processes, in which a self is able to take risks, without paralysing anxiety, and is open to a process of renegotiation, through the encouragement, attentiveness, understanding and challenge of others. We can be most fully our-selves in playful, imaginative, meaningful creativity, as a result.

Gina, it is to be noted, became an advocate with the local housing authority for single-parents like herself as well as getting involved in peer sex education programmes in schools. She became, in effect, an important member of the group, helping forge some self-respect. She became more of a political agent in advocacy, challenging negative stereotypes and deficit models of people like her. We can see in narratives growing self-esteem too (West, 2009). She could at times regress and act out in destructive or defiant ways, underling the idea that TL might be no simply linear processes. However, she also recognised how much she had changed: able to tell new stories, having learnt a capacity for playfulness, including with her own child. She also became critically reflexive, engaging with and learning from her

anxieties, as well as taking on those who would simply disparage. She felt, she said, seen, understood, as well as challenged. She talked too of being an artist and activist, for the first time in her life. Interestingly, she also said that she felt listened to and understood by me, indicating how research itself can act as a kind of transitional and even transformational process, over time, through the serious business of narrating a life, and thinking about it with another (West, 2009).

'Mathew' was a black refugee asylum seeker in his mid-thirties who went to university. He struggled with academic work primarily because of limited confidence with English, (it was in fact his fourth language). Mathew recognised the value of the languages he did know, viewing them as opportunities for better understanding of others' worlds. His father had had an important place in his culture of birth, but Mathew was forced to flee this because of war, in a particularly poignant wrenching of self. He worked as an hourly paid-minimum wage carer since arriving on British soil, seeking asylum. He initially dropped out of an 'elite' university, where he struggled with writing and understanding what was called the personal tutor system. He then enrolled on an Access to higher education course for adults and made friends with an English couple working on the programme, in a college of further education. He found especial support from them in pursuing an asylum status application and to renew his university education.

Mathew, like a number of students, inhabited a world where boundaries between full and part-time study, work and university, family and student life, were blurred:

I do work...I used to work for agency but agencies shifts are not constant so I joined BUPA (a private health care provider) as a healthcare assistant. The rate is £5.90 for an hour... my partner is a nurse works shifts... I would be looking after the kids I have four boys... I've given up sleep lost hours of sleep to attend to the family and then education sometimes. I go to bed by three o'clock I get up by four o'clock five o'clock... I get up... prepare whatever I've got to take into [my] school, eat and shower the boys and leave them to dress by themselves and then go pack their bags/ lunch and leave home by 8 o'clock they're supposed to start classes by 8.30 I mean 8.45 I'm supposed to start by 9... I have to drive to drop them to a neighbour who is very close to the school and who can just walk... so it's very much more difficult than people might think.

The two lecturers in the college were significant others in his struggle over self-confidence: he forged a close relationship, first as a student wrestling with English, and then in the process of making an asylum application. Earlier, they had noticed that he stopped attending the Access course, on a regular basis, and asked why. He told them about changed regulations (in a wider climate of growing hostility towards 'immigrants'), which forced him to report on a weekly basis to a detention centre. The lecturers recruited a range of people to help, including a lawyer, and began a campaign to support Mathew. Five years later, he was officially recognised as a British citizen in a citizenship ceremony, and they were there as witnesses. They were like 'good parents', he said: he felt looked after and understood by them. He thought of the ceremony itself as a moment of transition, a benchmark of achievement in what could be a fragile world. He also worked hard to find supportive others in a new university in the multi-cultural world of a particular part of London. Finding a good personal tutor, and other sympathetic staff and students, was central to this, he said.

A public healthcare degree appealed because of the shortage of male carers in the National Health Service. In a second interview, he reflected on the language issues:

It is difficult because when we started in the first year they said to us OK this first year we give you the opportunity and accept your assignment as is... that has been changed because of the stage of second year so you're now needing proof reading and that makes it difficult for people like me considering my background which I'm always constantly worried about how to translate my thoughts my ideas from one language to another, from Mende/Kissi/Creole languages, to African English, then to British English is something that makes it difficult for me....

Yet his cultural diversity, alongside academic achievement, brought recognition. His competence in a variety of languages became a resource in negotiating a new identity and in cultivating a more critical, questioning edge:

Well from my languages from the various languages that I've gone through if you look at health for instance you cannot purely have a disease by itself. In that way you look at the medical models instead of looking at the social... or psychosocial aspect of it for the patient...having got some ideas about the...psychosocial aspect of health, taking it back to my past cultures... without making the connection with the social aspect you cannot treat the patient... so I bring in this system where I realise or begin to understand how I can actually help the sick from different cultures.

He became a student advocate and community activist as well as serving as a representative for overseas students in the university and being a member of important committees. He learned to argue his case, within this context, finding greater self-respect, maybe self-esteem too, in the process (and in telling stories about it). He talked of people – academics, for instance - missing him and his ideas when he could not attend a particular meeting. He felt recognised in diverse communities and he also critiqued the neglect of the cultural dimensions of health care and a lack of attention given to minority communities and their experiences in the delivery of health services. He found symbolic friends in academic literatures that illuminated the neglect of the psychocultural dimensions of health care. He talked a great deal of the failure to locate health and dis-ease in wider socio-political analysis. Yet, Mathew's, like Gina's, is no simple linear tale. He continued to struggle with written assignments and in both the second and third interviews, the research itself became, for a moment, an explicit transitional space, in which he thought about his options and looked to us (there were two researchers in this project) for guidance, in an emotionally needy way:

I don't want it to be a sign of weakness if I ask somebody to help me [proof reading my essay], that might make me a weak person... but there are a lot of resources which they call academic skills...I did it once, I've never done it again...but I have to change that because if I want to succeed I have to do that because the system is set up for that.

He asked what we thought and the boundaries between auto/biographical narrative interviewing and educational counselling, and between past and present, were blurred, and self-confidence fragile. A colleague researcher encouraged him to seek help and to overcome his reluctance. He really wanted to know what she thought and began to talk at length. Admitting vulnerability was a dangerous business, he said, for someone like him, and he valued our meetings. He made the decision to try again with an assignment. By the time of the third interview, he had organised a new pressure group for multi-cultural sensitivities in

health care, building on his work as a student advocate at the university. And he found new symbolic resources for critically interrogating the assumptions of Western medicine, and especially the neglect of the effects of poverty, or the reduction of people and their suffering to a medical category. We have glimpses in the material of different levels of recognition: at the most intimate, in terms of new relationships, and of feeling seen and valued, including in the research; of self-respect, in being accepted as part of a wider community of rights within the university; and of self-esteem through the experience of being an effective political activist and advocate. Yet, to repeat, this is no simple, linear progression: after the interviews, Mathew wrote on a number of occasions to us, asking for help with assignments, and he constantly feared 'failure' in the ritual called academic writing. It remained hard to admit vulnerability and the need for help.

### **Recognition in the symbolic order**

Such processes of transformation, including finding recognition in the symbolic order, are discernable in the history of workers' education in the United Kingdom. An important strand here was the development of what were called 'tutorial classes', which one of their tutors, a subsequently distinguished economic historian, described as 'an experiment in democratic education' (Tawney, 1964). About 25 or so worker students would meet weekly with a university teacher, in a spirit of equality, over a period of three years or more. The classes were free from examinations or prescribed curricula, and its members could explore and interrogate issues in their working lives from the perspectives of history, politics, economics, literature etc. Fortnightly essays were required, and the standard of some of these was remarkably high (West, 1972).

The contribution of workers' education, individually and collectively, and especially the tutorial classes, was, however, the target for major critique by a generation of mainly Marxist historians. Far from being transformational, possibilities for radical change were neutered among generations of working class autodidacts, (not least because, it was claimed, such education was brought under the respectable umbrella of university studies, with a curriculum that emphasised a common culture rather than one of conflict and antagonism). Incorporation into the established order, assimilation if you like, rather than radical transformation, was the consequence, so it was alleged. Yet this critique has been radically reappraised, in the light of more recent research drawing on the actual testimonies (in diaries, letters etc.) of diverse students themselves (Goldman, 1995; Rose, 2010). The testimony, when studied in depth, provides subtler insights into the role and qualities of workers' education, and of notions of transformation. The classes offered avenues into leadership roles for working class people, at local and national levels, for example (in fact, as Rose observes, the post Second World War British Welfare State, was, to an extent, a product of workers' education); but the classes also provided transitional space in which cosmopolitan learning, democratic relationships and personal transformations could flourish. Rose (2010), especially, has challenged what he sees to be a reductive, simplistic, ideologically driven disdain. He builds a more sympathetic interpretation: of how bigotry, propaganda and ignorance were challenged, democratic relationships forged, and new relationships established with the symbolic order, including the world of literature and ideas. There were spaces to question racist bigotry, for instance, in self as well as others, and to build a life on very different terms. In one account, Nancy Dobrin, born in 1914, tells a story of how the study of literature had revolutionary consequences. Nancy grew up in a home where learning was not valued, where there was either "a row or an order". She read little but later joined a workers' class, read avidly, but also admitted that she partly went to the class in a search of a man.

Nancy had worked for a German Jew during the Second World War and wrote about her own racism: she wondered what on earth he was doing in London, and why couldn't people like him go home. Yet later, in another class, she met her future husband, a German Jewish refugee, who described himself as a Christian Communist. This was a relationship formed in the spaces of workers' education, in which others, and literature – as good objects – enabled her to question and transcend her own bigotry. She learned what we might call more democratic, inclusive sensibilities, as many others describe, in their own words (Rose, 2010: 274-275). This is the territory of meaningful TL and Bildung.

Nancy's story resonates in fact with those of other students in research into experiences of adult education, including of adult students at university (West, 1996). 'Brenda', for instance, like Nancy, found, in particular tutors and students, as well as in literature, recognition of her experience, and self, as well as glimpses of what she might be. She could relate to fictional characters, not least an abused, yet resilient woman in a novel by Mau Passant. Brenda is talking below about one of her heroines, that she has encountered in a literature degree:

.....Well, funny enough, it is a prostitute...And the reason I feel sorry for her is because she is within the confines of this coach with all these stereotype people who ostracise her, because she is different, because she is a prostitute, because she is a lady of easy virtue. I don't mean I am saying I am a lady of easy virtue but you know, because she is different and they then realise she has this hamper of food and they are on this very long journey. Oh, she is useful to know, let's get to talk to her. So they chat her up, eat her food and they arrive at an inn to stay overnight, I don't know if you know this story, the Prussians, you know, Prussian, Anglo Prussian, Franco Prussians. And the Prussian Officer is interested in her sexually so she doesn't want to know, she is trying to retain her dignity and she eventually gets coerced, emotionally blackmailed, forced, oppressed, call it what you like into going to bed with this chap and is terribly upset afterwards and they all climb back into the coach, by which time they have replenished their food supplies, which they fail to share with....And the last three lines of that story are so real and so painful, I just could draw alongside with her in that she is trying to hold back the tears of hurt and frustration and anger at being cheated when she really has been open and honest.

Brenda felt abused too, by men, across her life. Such a profound process of projective-identification – of finding aspects of self in a fictional and or an actual other – and of being able to internalise some of their resilience, (West, 1996), needs to be incorporated into a more developed theory of recognition: one encompassing unconscious, imaginative as well as emotional dynamics. Recognition of self in the 'fictional other' enabled Brenda – Nancy too, perhaps – to recognise oppression in her own life, and to be open to new agentic possibilities, via literature and feminism, for instance. Brenda, like Nancy, learned to play with ideas and to feel valued for it. New qualities of selfhood were forged in these different levels of recognition.

### **Conclusion**

Drawing on the object relations theories of Winnicott and Honneth's concept of intersubjective recognition, in the context of narratives such as those above, makes us appreciate more of the dynamic, agentic selves in the making, and of the different dimensions of TL or Bildung. The process is about more than exercising reason, or challenging tradition, alone, although this might be an important aspect. At a basic level, learners' selves and transformations seem deeply contingent, dependent on others and loving relationships in order to take risks and play. This is far from 'touchy-feely' indulgence and escape into self-

absorption, rather about a person being challenged to question who they are, have been and might be. A process both intimate and socio-cultural: including finding particular qualities of groups, in which self-respect is nurtured. We may learn, in good enough groups, to be more open to the other and to questioning self, including our bigotry and ignorance, for example. We become part of a community, with rights and responsibilities, animated by relative openness, enquiry and questioning at a group level, as in the best of the tutorial classes. At a wider level, increased self-esteem can be stimulated when someone like Mathew feels recognised by diverse others, because of his contributions to a community's well-being and its solidarity. The capacity to question, to think beyond the norm, to play with different ideas, and to become more of the agentic, realised self is rooted in such self/other, cultural/psychic, conscious/unconscious, feeling/cognitive dynamics.

The largely unconscious processes of projection and introjection seem crucial too: including being open to new symbols (or objects) and thus to generate new meanings for self in the world. For some learners, like Gina, Brenda and Nora, transformation had to do with new recognition of self experience in the other of sculpture or literary characters, and of finding greater meaning and even liberation in this. 'This is like me, I know this place; I know this kind of oppression, yet it can be transcended. I can tell new stories'. Selves claiming space for imaginative play, for an experiment with identity in the company of sympathetic others. The good and open group, like a tutorial class, enables us to experiment in the world of ideas, to find new theoretical friends, and to experience new forms of social engagement, across difference. We move, in this process, towards a more relational, psychosocial and meaning making understanding of transformation. Groups matter greatly in questioning rather than accepting givens or dominant discourses; and or for transcending the ubiquitous stultifying constraints of *halbbildung*, for instance. Wider cultures matter too, when our contribution is recognised, and in ways that make it possible to better acknowledge and recognise others, on which more inclusive social solidarities might depend. We need more spaces in groups and across our societies and in our intimate relationships in which the most animated, unrestrained interplay of selves is made possible, and the potential for transformation is enhanced, at an individual as well as collective level.

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## (De)Constructing the European Union: The transformation of Lifelong Learning policy through a Mezirowian perspective

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### Abstract

The present study aims to elucidate the development of the European Union policy framework for Lifelong Learning, attempting a critical review of policy texts with high political significance, in light of Mezirow's ten-step process of transformative learning.

### The context

Adult learning is not a new concept. It was encountered in the works of Plato and Aristotle, with "paideia" throughout life considered the "grandiose and sole means" for harmonious self development and fulfillment, as well as for fostering cohesion and development in society (Plato's Republic; Aristotle Politics). Yet, it was rediscovered in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with Faure's (Faure et al., 1972) and Delors' (Delors, 1996) Reports being the two seminal policy papers under the auspices of UNESCO which intensified the debate on the paramount role of adult education, boosting it up the international education policy agenda under the umbrella term Lifelong Learning (LLL). The Platonic and Aristotelian ideals attributed to learning throughout life are eminent in both Reports considering adult education a normative framework for self-fulfillment and social justice amid the "challenges posed by a rapidly changing world" (Delors, 1996, p. 20).

What however gained adult education and training a new momentum as an overarching policy goal was the development of the Human Capital Theory (HCT) during the 1960s, with intangible assets such as individuals' skills and knowledge, assumed to account for a large portion of productivity over tangible capital, generating benefits for economies, organisations, individuals and society (Schulz, 1963). HCT has greatly impacted education and training policies throughout Western countries, while on these grounds adult education has been retheorised as a *conditio sine qua non* for sustainable growth and social stability.

Hence, in the 1990s LLL reemerged among governments of Western nations, conceptualised and propagated by international organisations with a strong HCT rationale (Moutsios, 2009; Schuetze, 2006). In light of this wider policy consensus that turned LLL from a political slogan to an active tool for the reform and modernisation of education and training systems (Field, 2001), it was espoused by the European Union (EU), plagued in the 1990s by a massive unemployment crisis. The White Paper on Growth and Competitiveness issued by Delors in 1993 was the launching point for the structural reform demanded to turn around the unemployment undermining the fabric of society (Jones, 2005). Nevertheless, it took several years to launch an integrated policy agenda on investment in human resources. A milestone in this policy shift was the Lisbon European Council (EC, 2000), inaugurating an ambitious strategic framework so as to turn EU into the most competitive economy worldwide, based on knowledge.

In this regard, the present study aims to elucidate the development of EU policy framework for LLL, attempting a critical review of policy texts with high political significance through a *Mezirowian* perspective.

### Methodology

According to Mezirow (1991), when we learn we usually attribute old meaning to a new

experience (mindless assimilation), while in transformative learning we reinterpret an old experience from a new set of expectations and/or perspective, resulting into a paradigm shift. As pointed out:

*"Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings."* (Mezirow 1991, p. 167)

Hence, in the light of transformative learning theory, perspective transformation emanates from a ten-step process (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22), evolving around the following process actions: a) a disorienting dilemma; b) self-examination; c) critical assessment of assumptions; d) recognising that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; e) exploring new roles, relationships and actions; f) formulating a course of action; g) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; h) provisionally trying out new roles; h) building competence and self-confidence in new roles; and i) reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

In this respect, the present study attempts a critical review of the development of EU policy framework for adult education, under the LLL umbrella, through an interpretative approach of policy texts with high political significance, grounded on the analytical lens of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Systematically exploring relationships between discursive practices and the process actions accounting for effective transformation, as described by Mezirow (2000), it is thereby attempted to identify trends and interrelations between EU adult education policy and emerging challenges within the Union, as well as global socioeconomic mandates, elucidating the conditions that inform contemporary EU LLL policy.

In drawing up a comprehensive list of primary material, research was conducted using the "Europa" official documents database ([http://europa.eu/publications/official-documents/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/publications/official-documents/index_en.htm)). The search was run within the Commission of the European Communities (CEC) and the European Council (EC) official documents, using "lifelong learning" and "education and training" as key words. The policy texts included in the study were conditioned for relevance to the topic and issuing year, so as to enable equal allocation in the period under scrutiny

## Results

Since the 1990s educational interventions targeted at adults have been growingly informed by neoliberal regimes. Within a new form of global capitalism (Castells, 2000), the capability of producing, utilising and diffusing knowledge has actually emerged as a dominant economic activity. Hence, since the beginning of the twenty-first century there has been experienced not only the subjugation of education to the mandates of the global economy (Moutsios, 2009), but also the incremental transnationalisation of education policy making in light of a globally structured agenda for education (Dale, 2005). In this respect, our results have indicated a substantial perspective shift in the political imperatives governing LLL in the EU, in order to foster a "knowledge economy" apt to restore EU competitiveness in the global arena.

In detail, the **disorienting dilemma**, igniting EU LLL policy perspective transformation, emanated as a result of confrontation with escalating unemployment rates in the 1990s. As highlighted in the White Paper on Growth and, Competitiveness:

*"Why this White Paper? The one and only reason is unemployment. We are aware of its scale, and of its consequences too."* (CEC, 1993, p. 9)

Hence, with *"the potential rate of growth having shrunk, unemployment steadily rising and EU competitive position in relation to the USA and Japan having worsened"*, investment in

education, under a lifelong perspective, emerged as a panacea in “*withstanding international competition and creating the millions of jobs needed*” (CEC, 1993), while in 1995 a second White Book was endorsed entirely devoted to the prominent role of education and training in growth and social justice (CEC, 1995).

Throughout the first half of the 1990s, the EU went through the **self-examination phase** experiencing “feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame”, explicitly reflected in political discourses. With the principal aim that “*the Community economy must be made more dynamic, by making sure that it remains competitive with its principal rivals and by mastering new technologies, especially information technologies*” (BEC, 1995), it was realised that “*further efforts*” were needed “*to solve the structural problems*”, whereas “*everyone concerned would have to assume their responsibilities fully*” (BEC, 1994). Furthermore, there was growing concern on providing “*an improved response to European citizens' legitimate expectations*” as to combating “*the scourge of unemployment effectively*” (BEC, 1995), while there have been apologetic implications, as to the delayed emphasis on LLL: “*it may be surprising that the realisation of the role education and training can play has come so late and that it has taken an economic recession to bring it about*” (CEC, 1995). Moving onto **critically assessing internalised role assumptions**, becoming conscious of how and why habits of perception, thought and action have distorted ways of defining the problem and the Union in relationship to it, there was reached an understanding of both the intensity of the challenges imposed, as well as of the trail that LLL policies needed to follow: “*Much of the effort made in recent years to stem the rise of unemployment in Europe has not had lasting effects. ... Long term unemployment continues to increase and the spread of social exclusion, particularly among young people, has become a major problem in our societies.*” (CEC, 1995)

In this regard, Karl-Johan Lönnroth, Director of Commission's DG for Employment, Industrial Relations and Social Affairs, outlined in his opening address in a conference held in Brussels in 1998, that the problems confronted in the Union:

“*...are partly due to our own incapacity in Europe to handle macroeconomic shocks of the last 25 years in a coordinated way and our inability to reform our labour market and our social protection systems to meet the needs of the labour market of today, which has led to the present poor job creation and low employment rate. But they are partly also due to the insufficient ability of our education and training systems to anticipate and cope with the requirements of structural change and the needs of labour market*” (Lönnroth, 2000, p.18).

Although alluded that education cannot be diminished to a mere utilitarian role, as “*the essential aim of education and training has always been personal development*” laying the foundation for citizenship and social cohesion, it was explicitly denoted that LLL policies should be primarily informed by the employment agenda, underlining that they cannot substantially contribute to combating exclusion unless they are “*accompanied by the prospect of employment*” (CEC, 1995). Thus, discourses revolve around the burden of “*too much inflexibility*” in education and training to reciprocate with labour market mandates, while propounding the necessity for convergence LLL policies (Lönnroth, 2000).

In this vein, the Treaty of Amsterdam added impetus to working “*towards developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly for promoting a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce*” (OJEU, 1997, p.33), while 1996 was declared as the “European year of lifelong learning” (OJEU, 1995) aiming, inter alia, to foster better cooperation between education and training structures and the business community, and establish a European area of education and training.

At the threshold of the new millennium, amidst incremental advancement in information technologies and concomitant changes in the structure of employment, there was escalating concern towards the fact that although EU **competitors shared similar experiences**, they

had managed to lead the global race for innovation and competitiveness. As pointed out by the Commission (CEC, 2000, p.2):

*“Today, the EU, like every other region, is facing a paradigm shift driven by globalisation and the new knowledge economy. This is impacting on every facet of life and requires a radical transformation of Europe’s economy and society.”*

Yet, although reported that some positive steps had been made, it was acknowledged that *“...weaknesses persist. The EU’s growth rates have consistently been less than the US, unemployment remains unacceptably high and too many people are excluded from society. The European economy is simply not as dynamic as some of our major Competitors.”* (CEC, 2000, p.4)

In this context, **exploring options for new roles, relationships and action**, the Lisbon European Council (EC, 2000) inaugurated an ambitious policy shift, reorienting EU policies to capture the benefits of the knowledge based economy through an integrated policy agenda on investment in human resources. Acknowledging that the EU is *“confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalisation and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy”*, the maximalistic goal of building *“the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”* was set, while a comprehensive policy agenda known as the “Lisbon Strategy” was endorsed, comprising a set of soft policy tools, such as the *“Open Method of Coordination”* (OMC), setting guidelines and timetables in policy implementation along with consolidating the policy direction (EC, 2000).

The goals set in Lisbon actually prescribed a dual role for LLL, entrenching education and training policies in a monolithic human capital rationale, while becoming an “alibi” for committing member-states to a coherent policy, in the face of fitting the exigencies of competitiveness and employment. Gradually, therefore, **formulating a course of action** for propounding the new role attributed to LLL and consolidating the extension of its sovereignty beyond purely economic policies, the EU, through the OMC, succeeded in directly impacting national education policies, practically overriding the Principle of Subsidiarity (OJEU, 1992). During the period 2000-2002, a large number of policy papers were issued, aiming at setting objectives and priorities, as well as a coherent framework of action under a common European education policy (CEC, 2000a, 2000b, 2001a, 2001b, 2002), while in May 2003 (EC, 2003) the Ministers of Education reached consensus over the establishment of five benchmarks to be achieved by 2010.

Nevertheless, the evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy, five years after its implementation, was not favourable enough, assessing results as insufficient (CEC, 2005a). Hence, **having acquired knowledge and skills** through its first stage of implementation, the European Council relaunched the Lisbon Strategy, under the threat that *“poor implementation of the Lisbon Strategy could have devastating costs for Europe, inhibiting progress and delaying development”* (CEC, 2004). The renewed course of action focused once again on growth and employment (CEC, 2005b), while the Community action was further extended by committing member states to draft national action plans for the period 2005-2008:

*“The challenges we face are even more urgent... Europe’s performance has diverged from that of our competitors in other parts of the world... The implementation of the reform agenda requires a renewed Partnership... the Commission will play its central role of initiating policy and ensuring implementation... In parallel, Member States must deliver the agreed backlog of Lisbon reforms. This should be backed up by National Lisbon Programmes – setting out how they will do this...”* (CEC, 2005b, p.4-7).

Within this framework of enhanced collaboration, **provisional trying of new roles** led to shifting European governance onto an accountability basis, so that member states would consistently commit to the policies initiated by the Commission, the “key-player” in European governance, (Rasmussen 2014). Both through the National Action Plans, along

with the monitoring of indicators and benchmarks, EU reinforced its sovereignty, propounding at the same time the quantification of the educational scene. To this end, the Council established in 2005 the Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL) (OJEU, 2005). Underlining the need to monitor performance and progress towards the Community goals, it was agreed that *"the establishment of the research unit on lifelong learning ... can significantly increase the Commission's research capacity in terms of the development of new indicators"* (OJEU, 2005). CRELL's remit is to conduct indicator-based evaluation and monitoring of education and training systems, reported annually in the reports on the "Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training".

The next step, entailing the gradual **building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships**, was taken through the development of a European toolkit, a novel "lingua franca" (Panitsides, 2013) apt to ensure greater transparency and convergence of education and training among member-states, providing for comparability of knowledge, skills, competences and qualifications, with the ultimate aim to enhance employability and mobility within the EU (CEC, 2011). Actually, the necessity of building a set of "European tools" was first outlined during the period 1992-1999, while their development was initiated during the previous decade (CEC, 1993, 1995, 2007a; EC, 2002). However, in the current decade, mainstreaming their use has become the central plank of EU policies. Their enforcement has been contributing into the pooling of sovereignty not on state but on individual level, enabling EU to reduce the potential for conflict and frequent non-compliance by member states and link directly with citizens, benefiting from direct visibility and legitimacy (Souto-Otero, 2011). The main "European tools" that have been developed, so far, are: a) the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF), b) the Europass, c) the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), d) the European Quality Assurance reference framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and e) the European Skills/Competences, qualifications and Occupations classification (ESCO).

The final stage of the transformational process in EU LLL policy, associated with **reintegration on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective**, was reached towards the end of the previous decade, in light of the poor results of the Lisbon Strategy and the ongoing economic crisis (CEC, 2010a). Within a gloomy and unstable perspective, the Council adopted a new strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (OJEU, 2009), "Europe 2020", mainly focusing on *"smart and inclusive growth"*, so as to build a smarter, greener and more competitive economy, with new jobs and lower levels of unemployment (CEC, 2009, 2011).

What is eminent in the renewed policy agenda, is that in the face of combating rising unemployment rates and skills mismatches, still persisting as a major challenge in the current decade, "Flexicurity" has been brought to the fore. The Council initiated flexicurity in 2007, comprising four components, flexible and reliable contractual arrangements, active labour market policies, LLL, and modern social security systems (CEC, 2007b). However, it is only since 2010 that flexicurity has been *"instilled with a new momentum"*, under the flagship initiative "An Agenda for new skills and jobs". Reiterating the importance of implementing flexicurity, as a precondition for achieving *"smart, sustainable and inclusive growth"*, it was stressed that its four components must be significantly strengthened and adapted to the new socio-economic context, enhancing partnership of state with social partners with the aim to modernise labour markets and promote employment through new forms of *"flexibility"* and *"security"* (CEC, 2010b).

## Discussion

Our analysis has indicated a paradigm shift in EU LLL policy both as regards the premises it

stems from, as well as the mode of governance in its implementation.

Regarding the first assumption, the disorienting dilemma that triggered the transformational learning process has been related to the inflating unemployment rates during the mid 1990s. Hence, despite a humanistic façade, earlier aspirations have been increasingly washed away in EU discourse, moving from a somewhat idealistic social justice to a more utilitarian HCT based model (Borg & Mayo, 2005). The transformational process thus led to a rhetoric shift replacing “employment” with “employability”, while rising global competitiveness and economic crisis in 2008 brought “flexicurity” to the fore, informed by an agenda which promotes learning schemes that rely on (and financed by) individuals.

In effect, the mandate set in Lisbon for increasing investment in education and training has been directly linked to the shift of LLL policies towards utilitarian schemata that entrench adult education in “efficiency”, “employability” and “performativity” patterns, while learners are increasingly held responsible for their own education but they seem to have little influence on the content, purpose and “point” of their learning (Biesta, 2006). In this context, participation in LLL is largely promoted as a moral obligation rather than as an opportunity (Biesta, 2006; Walker, 2009), assigned a strategic role in providing for an “up to date” workforce, with a better skills match and “flexible” enough to adapt to changing labour demands.

LLL policy has thus evolved into a strategy through which active citizens are mobilised in support of their own destinies, legitimating escalating demands of employers, intensification of workloads, retreat from the policy of full employment and reduction of public expenditure on welfare measures, wherein the state acts as a monitor and regulator rather than provider of services (Coffield, 1999; Edwards, 2002). As argued by Crowther (2004), LLL tends to become a means that diminishes the public sphere, undermines educational activity, introduces new mechanisms of self-surveillance and reinforces the view that failure to succeed is a personal responsibility. The “flexicurity” case is an eminent example of the foregoing debates, interconnecting LLL with “*flexible and reliable contractual arrangements*” and “*modern social security systems*” (CEC, 2010).

As regards the transformation in the mode of governance, Europe has been actually witnessing an attempt to build an unprecedented supra-national polity, with member-states deprived to some extent of their sovereignty, pooling legitimation under the threat of socioeconomic costs in the event of failure. With the principle of subsidiarity in force (OJEU, 1992), the range of legislative action for enforcing a European education policy has been rather limited. However, the development of a “discretionary” mode of governance (Souto-Otero, 2011), under the OMC framework, has been the breakthrough that enabled the EU to advance its supra-national interests in the education area. Furthermore, the enforcement of a set of EU “tools” has substantially added to this new form of “governmentality, contributing to the establishment of a European area of education, training and employment, while reducing the potential for conflict and non-compliance by member states.

### **(De)constructing the EU?**

In the present study an attempt was made to apply Mezirow’s framework beyond the individual level and outside the classroom context, to a complex institution, such as the EU, and its complicated nexus of policy shaping. Hence, although our study is limited in scope, relying on discourse analysis of policy papers, our results entail significant implications for education policy in the EU, indicating that the foci of the existing LLL paradigm is rather deficient.

Discourse patterns evolving around LLL have dramatically changed over the course of time, indicating a substantial perspective shift in the political imperatives governing adult education and training in the EU towards utilitarian and commodifying schemata.

Additionally, it tends to be a deficit discourse which locates the responsibility of economic and political failure at the level of the individual, rather than that of systemic problems (Crowther, 2004).

In this respect, it can be argued that there is a discrepancy between Mezirow's (2000) transformational learning framework and the focus of the paradigm shift in EU LLL policy. According to Merriam (2004), Mezirow's theory is a prime example of the interlocking of positive development and learning, through which transformative learning appears to lead to a more mature, more autonomous, more "developed" level of thinking. However, the challenging of preconceived notions in the EU case seems not to have led to a more sophisticated level of understanding. Substantial engagement in reflective discourse, involving a critical assessment of assumptions and reaching a clearer understanding of experience to arrive at a tentative best judgment (Mezirow, 2000), should have got EU technocrats round to realising that "more neoliberalism" cannot be the "thread" out of the unemployment "maze", which along with competitiveness deficiency have been plaguing EU since the 1990s.

We fully agree in that "*education is the key variable for economic and social progress of peoples in Europe*", as denoted in the treaty of Rome (OJEU, 2002). Yet, not entrenched in a "mindless assimilation" of the human capital rationale. If it is for the EU to live up to the expectations of its peoples and for LLL to assume its developmental, egalitarian and redistributive role, then a focused and mindful, instilled with critical reflection (Mezirow, 2000), transformation of LLL policies should be re-ignited.

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## (Mis-)Appropriation of Jack Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning in South Korea

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**Abstract:** We looked into the 12 academic journal articles by South Korean scholars explicitly taking Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory as theoretical framework to see if those articles appropriated the theory properly. We concluded that Mezirow's theory has been largely misappropriated. We discussed possible theoretical and cultural reasons for misappropriation.

### Introduction

Mezirow's transformative learning theory is one of the most influential theories in explaining learning in adulthood. Among diverse aspects of changes in our lives, the theory especially looks at and holds more importance on perspective transformation, and explains how one could transform one's habitual assumptions – which frame our perceiving, thinking, feeling, and acting – to new meaning schemes or meaning perspectives in adulthood. Learning through perspective transformation, according to Mezirow, is the most significant aspect that may occur in adult learning. Perspective transformation leads to more fully developed meaning perspectives and results in changes of the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions within which one's past experience assimilates into new experience. Based on Habermas' ideal learning conditions, Mezirow presents two major elements, critical reflection and dialectical discourse, which play a crucial role in making meaning and seeking agreement to transform meaning schemes and perspectives.

Since Mezirow first introduced the concept of transformative learning in 1978, the theory has been elaborated and expanded through a large number of empirical studies conducted in various fields. However, critiques have also emerged. Some argue the theory is overly inclined to rationality while excluding sociocultural context or other ways of knowing. Recently, Newman (2012) fundamentally questions whether transformative learning theory is just one kind of effective learning. He contends that transformative learning can be adequately comprehended by existing concepts such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Moreover it is rather hard to validate whether or not the learner's learning experiences really happened in the real life world as most of the empirical research depend solely on the learner's subjective retrospective interviews in constructing the transformative narrative. Newman goes on to argue that transformative learning only exists in theory. If Newman is right, how was the research taking Mezirow's theory as its theoretical framework conducted? In South Korea, Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been used in explaining significant changes in adulthood since 1990s. In this study, we aim to question South Korean empirical research articles' appropriation of Mezirow's theory with Newman's critique in mind. We critically reviewed selected empirical works with following three questions: (1) How did the articles deal with transformative learning in terms of Mezirow's original concepts? (2) How did the articles prove perspective transformation? And, (3) How did the articles report the result of transformative learning?

### Methods

We searched Korean Citation Index (KCI) administered by Korea Research Foundation with the key word 'transformative learning'. 14 journal articles were located and 12 of them adopted qualitative research designs. We chose four fundamental concepts from Mezirow's

theory for analysis: disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, seeking agreement, and taking actions. For the first three concepts, we categorized each article into a tri-level (o-Δ-x) based on our own understanding of intended meanings of the concepts in Mezirow's theory. The tri-level category is explained in Table 1. For the last concept, taking action, we tried to identify how each article depicted the result of perspective transformation saliently. Though this approach has shortcomings such as subjective simplification or de-contextualization, it enables us to synthesize the given articles effectively. Regarding two quantitative studies, we could not follow the above analysis procedure. The basic information of 12 qualitative studies is summarized in Table 2.

Symbols	Disorienting Dilemmas	Critical Reflection	Seeking Agreement
o	There is a disorienting dilemma involving problem posing.	There is critical reflection involving a critique of premises.	There is rational discourse and building consensus.
Δ	There is a disorienting dilemma as a kind of events.	There is content or process reflection, or any reflection not involving a critique of premises.	There is only received agreement, or any discourse could be only inferred from context.
x	No convincing evidences about disorienting dilemmas.	No convincing evidences about reflection.	No convincing evidences about discourse.

*Table 1. Tri-level category of three core concepts*

### Disorienting dilemmas

According to Mezirow (1991), “Perspective transformation can occur either through an accretion of transformed meaning schemes resulting from a series of dilemmas or in response to an externally imposed epochal dilemma” (p. 168). In other words, perspective transformation can occur through sudden life events such as death, disease, or retirement, while it can also take place accumulatively through daily small events such as talking, reading, or painting. Regardless of the size of events, a disorienting dilemma is the first phase of perspective transformation and the beginning of transformative learning. It is also the first step of “problem posing” (Freire, 1970) that problematizes our taken-for-granted social roles and expectations and the habitual ways we act and feel. However, a disorienting dilemma does not mean only a specific event that facilitates perspective transformation but the act of ‘perceiving the anomalies of sociocultural assumptions’ and ‘touching the assumptions’ that sustain the individual. As we question our habitual assumptions or frames of reference “which selectively shapes and delimits perception, cognition, and feelings” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163), a wave of confusion emerges. This process is also painful because it involves existential problems and challenges, which “often calls into question deeply held personal values and threaten our very sense of self” (Mezirow, 1991, p.168).

Most of the given studies present situations with disorienting dilemmas directly or indirectly. The situations are when/where participants experience difficulties such as immigration, studying abroad, new learning activities and strategies, or class environment designed to facilitate transformative learning. However, the studies have not gone so far as understanding them as the acts of perceiving anomalies of assumptions internalized in participants and touching the assumptions.

No.	Empirical Studies	Purpose	Methods
1	Lee (1999)	attempted to find out the meaning and possibility of transformative learning with 20 elders participating in Elder's Learning Center.	Observation / Interviews
2	Park (2003)	examined the nature of changes in meaning structures among 25 international graduate students from East Asia attending at Christian higher learning institutions in the US.	Interviews (once, 50-90 min)
3	Lee (2007)	explored triggers of the cross-cultural adaptation and transformative learning of a single Korean-American immigrant family (2 married couples) who has fully experienced both Korean and American culture.	Interviews (once, 60-120 min)
4	Lee & Na (2008)	examined the meaning of newly formed viewpoints of 6 married female immigrant farmers who has successfully attended farming and settled down in Korea for 2 months.	Participant observation / Interviews (twice)
5	Jung (2009)	attempted to analyze frame of reference of 4 early childhood teachers who participated in a series of multicultural teacher training sessions for 7 months (14 times).	Non-participant observation / Interviews / Participant's reflection notes
6	Park & Jo (2009)	explored the meaning and possibility of transformative learning with 42 pre-service early childhood teachers who had been engaged in vegetable gardening for 7 months.	Participants' writings (183 pieces) / Group interviews (once, 40-60 min)
7	Park (2009)	examined how the framework of a higher education context shaped the meaning making process with 30 middle aged women in a higher education.	Interviews (once, 60-90 min).
8	Park & Jo (2010)	explored 5 early childhood teachers' learning experiences and the relationship between their learning experience and professional development through Mezirow's transformative learning theory for 5 months.	Interviews (5-6 times) / Documents / Field notes / Non-participant observation
9	Cho (2010)	examined the continual reinterpretation of experience which 11 North Korean immigrants go through in the process of adapting to South Korean society for 7 months. 2 people's life histories were reconstructed among them.	Interviews (120-180 min)
10	Kim, et al. (2013)	investigated adult learners' learning experiences in classrooms that were designed to facilitate transformative learning with 4 international doctoral students.	Interviews (twice) / Participants' reflection notes
11	Kim (2013)	examined relation of transformative learning and moral development with 8 current or former women national and local parliament members who experienced social activities.	Interviews (once, 120 min) / Biographical documents
12	Park (2013)	provided an opportunity for 22 pre-service early childhood teachers to undergo transformative learning through critical reflection as part of the regular curriculum and explored the possibility of transformative learning for 4 months.	Participants' reflection notes / Group discussions

*Table 2. Basic information of qualitative-empirical studies*

The studies tend to identify the existential problems and challenges arising from disorienting dilemmas with the hardships resulting from their circumstances (cultural adjustment and discrimination, language constraints, changes in environment, etc.), and consequently do not capture participants' self-reflective dimension properly. Similarly, they misapprehend positive activity experiences such as new learning, and the conversation or the interaction with colleagues as if they do not generally belong to the category of disorienting dilemmas. As a result, the studies perceive that negative experiences are limited to catalytic experiences or triggering events, whereas for positive experiences they omit the details on the dilemmas and/or conclude that perspective transformation does not require disorienting dilemmas.

Difficult and embarrassing life events may work as a catalyst for perspective transformation, but the events are not automatically turned into disorienting dilemmas. Only a few studies described the presence of participants' existential internal confusion beyond simply difficult events (No. 9 and 11), except 'induced confusion' or 'tossed confusion' from special settings such as classes or study groups that promote transformative learning. Even among those studies about special settings, only two studies described it in detail (No. 5 and 8).

### **Critical reflection**

Reflection is a process of critical assessment to interpret experiences and make meanings, which is categorized into content reflection, process reflection, and premise reflection (Mezirow, 1991). Premise reflection is distinguished from the other two kinds of reflection as it involves "our becoming aware of why we perceive, think, feel, or act as we do and of the reasons for and consequences of our possible habits of hasty judgment, conceptual inadequacy" (p. 108). In other words, premise reflection is an activity that searches for an alternative meaning perspective by (re)assessing the reason for an existing psycho-cultural way that serves as a foundation of one's life. The premise reflection can be replaced with the equivalent terms, "critical reflection" or "theoretical reflectivity" (Brookfield, 1986, 1987; Broughton, 1977; Mezirow, 1991). The most important transformation involves a critique of premises for oneself, and critical reflection is the core process of emancipatory transformative learning. It evaluates meaning perspectives or frames of reference retroactively and leads to more fully developed meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience.

Among the given studies we analyzed, quite a few cases explained the transformation of meaning perspectives without reaching the level of critical reflection. Some studies claimed that perspectives have been transformed without explicit depiction of participants' reflective experiences. They cannot fully describe the process as they simply present the changed results or depend on another researchers' contention inappropriately or uncritically. In the latter case, any change experienced in a foreign country is portrayed as transformative with citing Taylor (1994) that explicated the transformative learning aspects of intercultural competency and arguing "intercultural adaptation is transformative learning process" (Lee, 2007: 4).

In addition, the empirical studies are unable to clearly explain by what a perspective is transformed if it is not done by critical reflection, even when it leaves aside the discussion on "Is Taylor's view (1997) – emphasis on the transformation by other ways of knowing that take place outside the bounds of intentional construal – qualitatively the same as transformation by critical reflection?" Many studies mistake (transformative) learning at the level of meaning scheme for transformation of meaning perspective. For example, the vignette in Lee (1999) in which "By

participating in a conversation with peers, the elderly ... learners acquire learning by themselves through *specific* [italics added] behaviors or words of a third party, and the peers play a role of 'mirror of reflection' that reflects the learner" (p. 188) is classified as 'learning new meaning schemes' among four learning forms that Mezirow proposed, and involves 'process reflection' on 'how' to perform according to specific situations. It is an inadequate example of perspective transformation that involves premise reflection.

Since meaning schemes consist a part of meaning perspectives, strict distinction between meaning perspective and meaning scheme may be impossible. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two concepts is often accepted without scrutiny in the process of describing and demonstrating transformative learning.

Although not described in detail, the traces of premise reflection have been observed in a few empirical studies (No 5, 8, and 9). For example, Park & Jo (2010) studied a female teacher named Hwang who found her views on the curriculum, which directed her orientation and beliefs in learning and instruction, "stirred up" when she was introduced to various views on early childhood education. And Hwang "recognized the presence of the 'framework' – the canon of early childhood education that she has believed true" (p. 205). Similarly, in Cho's study (2010), a North Korean defector transcended the awareness trapped in the "walls of religion" through critical reflection. It can be seen that the religion was huge assumptions that support and frame previous beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and value judgments for the participant.

### **Seeking agreement: rational discourse and consensus building**

As transformative learning theory shares emancipatory paradigm, rational discourse is as important as critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991, 1996, 2009). Following Habermas, it consists a 'dialectical synthesis' of the objective paradigm and the interpretive paradigm in the domain of communicative learning. It involves and focuses on critical reflection grounded in the very structures of intersubjective communicative competence to exceed the rational tradition and cognitive understandings. Rational discourse allows us to test the validity implicit in our statements or acts by communicating with each other, only then can we comprehend the concepts of meaning, understanding, and interpretation. Consensus building reached through rational discourse is an ongoing learning process and consensual validation should be a provisional agreement because new evidence or new information could always emerge from anywhere, especially from professionals or larger groups. If transformative learning does not involve the process of evaluating justifications, reflection in a strict sense does not occur and learning cannot go beyond a non-reflective category such as thoughtful action or introspection which has great risk of self-deception (Mezirow, 1991).

Except for four empirical studies in which the discourse process couldn't be revealed clearly, we were able to classify the aspects in reaching mutual agreement into 'received agreement' and 'seeking agreement'. Received agreement is the attitude of accepting the position suggested from one's social relationships and includes modeling, following a teacher's comments, or sympathizing with similar experiences. The participant in communication is a one-way acceptor or a sympathetic audience. As such, he or she is excluded from the role of an active agent in establishing meaning. Most empirical studies were not able to depict the detailed process of rational discourse properly as they simply highlighted that a certain perception come from the outside environment. This is contrary to Mezirow's emphasis on the importance of rational discourse, and is a complete departure from detailed

description of seeking agreement in transformative learning.

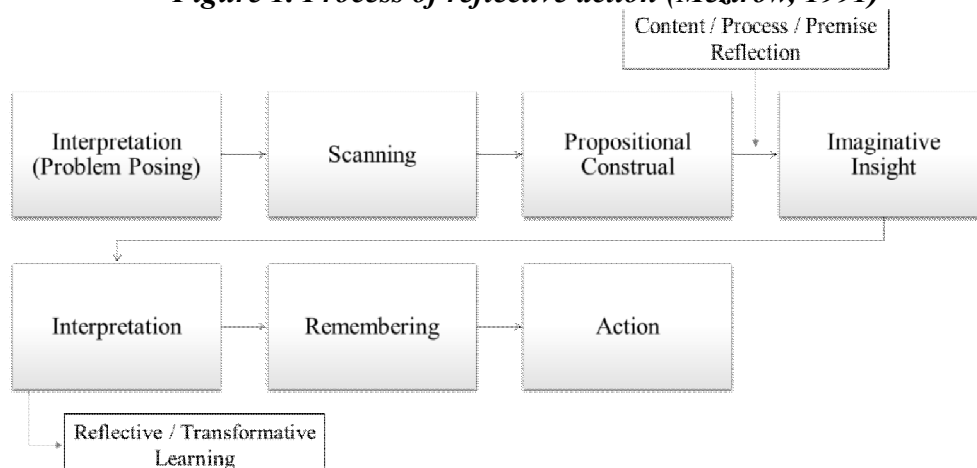
Rational discourse and consensus building is part of seeking agreement process. Seeking agreement is an act of self-directed meaning-making, which involves active formal/informal conversation, discussion, sharing, modification, and mutual feedback between two parties engaged in communication. They also freely express their vivid voices, verify with rational conversation, and gradually find shared rational understanding. The example of the most concrete approach to rational discourse among the given studies was Park's (2013). It described and analyzed self-verification process through communication in the context of facilitating transformative learning in classroom.

### Taking actions

Taking action based upon transformed insights involves “the significant and distinctive process of instrumental learning, which can become decisive for successful transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 197). Transformative learning is a dialectical process driven by critical reflection and rational discourse, and reaches a potentially stabilized conclusion in the end by taking action or perspective [Figure 1]. Such reflective action is “making decisions or taking other action predicated upon the insights resulting from reflection.” (p. 108). In other words, taking action is a self-determined expression and outcome of self that was reintegrated by a new perspective. Learning happens through corroborating or transforming the existing perspective through reflective action. Therefore, if previous assumptions are not found to be distorting and inauthentic, reflective action may not be transformative or aspects of specific changes may not be observed.

Participants' (reflective) actions were manifested in various ways including personal actions such as self-acceptance, asking around for help, connecting with religion, and joining an educational institution; collective actions such as educating, attending social activities, building a union, and participating in politics; and others such as maintaining previous beliefs. However, while emphasizing transformative aspects of reflective learning, most studies failed in presenting in detail how transformed meaning schemes or meaning perspectives work specifically in overall context of life. In contrast, Cho (2010) and Kim (2013) depicted relatively well how taking action operated and proceeded. For example, in the case of Mr. Park, Cho described a variety of plans and activities to help North Korean defectors adjust to the South Korean Society in accordance with transformed perspective – planning and establishing financial unions and social enterprises, training entrepreneurs, supporting start-up loans, and so on.

**Figure 1. Process of reflective action (Mezirow, 1991)**





No.	Qualitative-empirical Studies	Disorienting Dilemmas	Critical Reflection	Seeking Agreement	Taking Actions & Changed Things
1	Lee (1999)	Δ	×	Δ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in social activities</li> <li>• More active and confident</li> <li>• Having desire for learning</li> </ul>
2	Park (2003)	Δ	×	Δ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More active, positive and relaxed</li> <li>• Improved self-esteem, empathy, and critical thinking skills</li> </ul>
3	Lee (2007)	Δ	Δ	×	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More active, positive and pragmatic</li> <li>• Changed attitude toward different culture</li> </ul>
4	Lee & Na (2008)	Δ	Δ	Δ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in educational programs</li> <li>• Having a new identity or an interest in nature</li> </ul>
5	Jung (2009)	○	○	×	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on cultural bias or diverse criteria</li> <li>• Having new attitude toward early children</li> </ul>
6	Park & Jo (2009)	Δ	Δ	Δ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changed attitude toward farmers, parents and nature</li> <li>• Taking care of nature</li> </ul>
7	Park (2009)	×	×	×	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More active, flexible, grateful and satisfied</li> <li>• Setting up a life goal and an identity</li> <li>• Improved communication skills</li> </ul>
8	Park & Jo (2010)	○	○	Δ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering individual differences of children</li> <li>• Understanding children's attitude</li> </ul>
9	Cho (2010)	○	○	×	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing learning</li> <li>• Planning and educating to establish union</li> <li>• More active and satisfied</li> </ul>

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaining recognition from others</li> </ul>
10	Kim, et al. (2013)	Δ	Δ	Δ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More open-minded</li> <li>• Changed attitude toward one's own relationships</li> <li>• Having a new identity</li> </ul>
11	Kim (2013)	○	Δ	○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating in social activities and politics</li> <li>• More active and satisfied</li> <li>• Improved moral development</li> </ul>
12	Park (2013)	Δ	Δ	○	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More open-minded</li> <li>• Exploring other points of view</li> </ul>

*Table 3. Summary of Analysis*

### **What was changed by transformative learning?**

The results of analysis of the 12 qualitative empirical studies are summarized in Table 3. Three key components of transformative learning – disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, and seeking agreement are classified as tri-level. The last column of Table 3 provides a brief summary of key contents of taking actions and changed things transformative learning.

According to Mezirow, a more fully developed frame of reference is one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience. (Mezirow, 1991, 1996). What was changed by transformative learning reported in the empirical studies? Regardless of our analysis of using key components in Mezirow's theory – disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection, seeking agreement, and taking actions, all studies either claimed changes in participants' perspectives or at least indicated there is a sufficient likelihood of perspective formation.

The changed aspects of life that the studies presented as the result of perspective transformation are more surprising. As summarized in 'Taking Actions & Changed Things' in Table 3, the participants in many studies reported that they acquired more active, positive, accepting, and reflective attitude, and increased stability in life, happiness, and satisfaction. For example, Park (2009), in which Mezirow's key components are barely included, argues that forming an intimate, collaborative, and trusting relationship are key components in transforming learners' assumptions, and states that the components had a wide range of effects across cognitive, affective, and behavior domains. Cognitive changes included broader points of view, new life goals and identity, and confidence; affective changes included satisfaction, gratitude, happiness, sense of achievement, and other-oriented attitude; and behavior changes included more active and invigorating life, higher academic aspiration, and communication skills. Although the specific contents that had changed vary across studies, the results are generally consistent with improved meaning perspectives that Mezirow mentioned which is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable, critically reflective, and integrative of experience. If one does not have information on what we

evaluated regarding the key components of transformative learning, it would not be easy to determine if meaning perspective has actually been transformed based only on the changed aspects of life of the participants.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

We cannot but conclude that most of the empirical studies we analyzed did not properly appropriate Mezirow's transformative learning theory. We found many studies often replaced disorienting dilemmas with various hardships encountered in daily lives. They overlooked the process of reflective stir-up is closely linked to one's existential matters. Also, in the process of understanding critical reflection, they often used concepts of meaning perspective and meaning scheme without differentiation. Critical reflection is a kind of reflection on meaning perspective, which must involve questions on 'why' participants perceive, think, feel, or act as such. In the given studies, participants were often described as they investigated how specific actions and events operate and searched for the reasons behind them, but scarce were the abductive process that the participants tried a new solution with reasonable imagination by reassessing a way of knowing they had taken for granted. Learning activities involving critical reflection are not always transformative. They are sometimes about new insight or changes in identity at a meaning scheme level. In many studies authors seemed to misapprehend rational discourse as received agreement that is accepting others' positions or meaning scheme without questioning at all. However, transformative learning theory is based on Habermas' ideal communicative conditions and in order to participate in critical discourse participants:

- have accurate and complete information
- are free from coercion and self-deception
- have the ability to weigh evidence and evaluate arguments
- have the ability to be critically reflective
- are open to alternative perspectives
- have equality of opportunity to participate, and
- will accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity. (Mazirow, 1991, p. 198)

That is, seeking agreement is a constructive process that participants actively engage in making meaning. It is not a simple acceptance or assimilation without critical interaction with others.

The first reason for misappropriating Mezirow's theory is uncritical relies on the familiarity and the similarity of the concepts used in the theory. Research studies and educational activities based on critical reflection and discourse have greatly been increased with gradual emphasis on learner-centered approach. As a result, some other interpretations of reflection are used in various fields with slightly different meanings: metacognition (psychologists), reflective observation (Kolb, 1984), reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), mindfulness (Langer, 1989) and so on. Furthermore, the concepts of reflection and discourse tend to be used without clear distinction from other similar concepts in Korea: reflection is treated as the equivalent to the terms such as deliberation, (re)thinking, (re)consideration, introspection, meditation, and repentance, while discourse is used as the equivalent to the terms such as story, talking, conversation, communication, and public opinion. As the meanings of reflection and discourse were expanded and habituated, researchers seem to have failed to fully adopt Mezirow's approach that differentiates between meaning scheme and meaning perspective.

The second reason for misappropriation can be traced to the influence of

Confucianism on learning. Confucian philosophy has influenced significantly in the formation of the nation's spirit. It appears that the Confucian virtues emphasizing 'newness (新)' in the phrases of 'Renewing day by day (日新又日新)' and 'Contemplating the old and knowing the new (溫故知新)' considerably influenced the outcome-oriented conception of learning in Korea. The tendency of appropriating Mezirow's theory simply and naively focusing on the certain outcome rather than process of change or transformation might have something to do with this conception of learning.

The third reason lies in that Habermas' ideal learning conditions for critical discourse are hard to achieve in the real world of experience. Ideal conditions are important components that allow transformative learning, and require open and permeable sociocultural atmospheres as well as individuals' capacity for reflection. However, significant constraints always exist for individuals to actively express opinions and share discourse. Among the analyzed studies, Jung (2009) and Park (2013) criticize the lack of two-way communication and management-dependent organizational culture for why perspective transformation does not take place properly.

It seems Mezirow's transformation theory cannot escape from Newman's (2012) critiques based on our analysis. Newman argues that the many examples depicted as the results of transformative learning can be sufficiently explained in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In addition, 'important changes' in life are natural outcome of any learning activity that expects positive changes. The participants of the studies we analyzed changed toward more active and positive direction, and the level of their happiness and satisfaction increased; however, these changes were not dependent upon how well they participated in the process of critical reflection and rational discourse. Regardless of whether the participants' learning was achieved through the transformation of meaning perspective or at the lower level, the uniqueness of Mezirow's transformative learning was not present. In other words, the results in the empirical studies can be explained in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that Newman referred to.

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## TL and teaching in HE: from evaluation to an embodied relational theory

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### Abstract

This paper develops some ideas around the process of evaluation of transformative learning in higher education, more precisely in the context of a Master course. The case study (here only drafted) is based on a corpus of letters produced by graduate students at the end of a course whose explicit aim was TL. These texts contain interesting information about learning: metaphors of stability and uncertainty, emotions, the feeling of being challenged, disoriented and shaken, and different relational positions. Other data come from the teacher (and author of this paper), through auto-ethnographic writing and personal reflections. This research is a pilot project to be continued in the next year, with a more explicit involvement of the students as researchers in the whole process. The framework for this study is a systemic, dialogic and cooperative theory of learning; a qualitative and interpretative approach to research seems reasonable for TL, as it may celebrate a deeply subjective as well as relational view of learning. The paper is meant to be used during the conference to raise a debate about models/approaches of research for TL.

### *Foreword of the author*

This paper is a work-in-progress theoretical, epistemological and methodological framework for a more data-based presentation that will be done during the conference. The research here addressed is only at its beginning. Some texts from the case study will be shared and discussed during the conference. The aim of the paper is to make connections between the systemic and complexity view and the theory of transformative learning as proposed by Jack Mezirow, but also in some of its more recent developments. At the same time, it tries to open space for a larger relational, contextual, dialogical and situational view of transformative learning.

I try to build a dialogical and contextual view of learning. This inevitably involves me as a researcher in a deep transformation of my role, way of doing, interpretation of “data” and development of theories. In my view, TL is not simply a theory to be juxtaposed to others. It evokes the researcher as an adult learner, and entails a critical reflection on presuppositions. This is why I use the first person in my paper: I cannot hide myself behind data, or theories, or my results.

### **Learning as the human way to coordination: a systemic epistemology**

*“How can I know what I think, if I have not yet talked to anybody?” (G. Cecchin)*

*“I think better with my mouth open” (J. Norris)*

We need the Other to be able to develop our thinking. Conversations – not the individual “head” - are the *locus* of learning. My position in this paper is that human learning emerges from a composition of (inter)actions and meanings that opens space for (new) inter-action and meaning. In systemic theory learning is a word for human co-evolution, and the process of co-evolution is engendered by a “narration”, i.e. something that happens in language, an open, ongoing processes of “recursive

consensual coordination of consensual coordinations of actions or distinctions” (Maturana, 1990, p. 93). Actions and distinctions are interconnected: in Maturana's view, human life happens at every single moment both in the physical *and* in the symbolic domain, their composition maintains the “structural coupling” that is necessary to live.

In this view, togetherness is a constitutive aspect of human life, and conversations (interactions in language) are the human solution to the necessity of coordination. Objects in language are “operationally obscure” but useful “for further recursive consensual coordinations of actions by the observers” (ivi.). Such common objects as a “family”, “identity”, and even “transformative learning” are considered as obscure linguistic objects that operate as tokens for coordination. They exist only in language.

“language is a closed operational domain in the sense that it is not possible to step outside language through language, and descriptions cannot be characterizations of independent entities [...] everything said is said by an observer to another observer [...] Without observers nothing exists, and with observers everything that exists exists in explanation” (Maturana, 1990, p. 106-107).

Our understanding of any linguistic object “resides in the circumstances of its enaction” (Maturana, 1990, p. 100; see also Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1991).

“Interactions in language do not take place in a domain of abstractions; on the contrary, they take place in the corporality of the participants. Interactions in language are structural interactions” (Maturana, 1990, p. 94).

This brings us to the relevance, for research, of the body and bodily changes – emotions, feelings, perceptions – that are linked to narration, and to an embodied view of knowledge, stories, and learning itself.

Ontogenesis – the individual's development - is defined by Maturana as a “structural drift”, and by Bateson as co-evolution of system and context. Self-narration is not only a way of telling one's story; it is an enacted version of it. While narrating, we enact our form.

These concepts offer a framework to review traditional ways of learning, teaching, and researching. How does an individual, a group, a whole culture, develop as a system by composing (inter)actions, learning, and meaning? An “ecology of ideas” (Bateson, 1976) shows coherence at different levels. In his first formulation of TL, Jack Mezirow made reference to Bateson, but his followers do not seem very interested to develop more on the connections between TL theory and systemic theory. What kind of research do we need to understand what is going on in learning, and TL? Qualitative, narrative and participatory ways to research can be contexts where these questions have a meaning and researchers can become reflexive about the connections of different levels of learning. A dialogical way to knowledge, where learning experiences and contexts are narrated, analyzed and critically reflected upon, is a way to reveal the conditions of ontogenesis, hence the learning processes, their constraints and results. Not only for the individual, but for the system he/she is involved in.

Auto/biography (the slash is to state interdependence of I/Other in the narrative conversation, see Merrill, West, 2009) can be a learning experience if it creates space for critical, transformative learning (Bateson's level II or III, as we will show later on). Auto/biography is not only aimed to answer the question: “What and how did I

learn?” (reflective question). It may also answers to another question: “How did I learn about learning itself?” (reflexive question), when it touches presuppositions, cultural frameworks, family scripts that were acting in the learning process.

### **Towards a dialogic reading of TL: Jack Mezirow meets Gregory Bateson**

The theory of TL addresses a complex set of phenomena, where:

- frameworks of reference are shaken and challenged: epistemological dimension;
- learners gain a broader and deeper (or higher?) view of themselves and the world: personal paradigm;
- educational relationships in context change: collective transformation.

The word “learning” undoubtedly denotes *change* of some kind. To say *what kind of change* is a delicate matter. (Bateson, 1972, p. 283)

Bateson is focused on presuppositions about learning, i.e. *beliefs* and *values*. These are not usual words in research and education, that are increasingly empiricist, pragmatic, and sometimes anti-ecological fields. Research should not be alien from the “stuff” of relations and lived life; hence, it has to take into consideration its presuppositions and try to improve them. *Questioning* can help; in TL we are brought to *question* practices of knowledge (teaching, researching, understanding...) and their meaning. Disorienting dilemmas challenge our presuppositions, i.e. in batesonian terms, our (previous) learning contexts.

Learning contexts are inscribed in our biographies and identities; while we were learning how to write and read (to *be* a student), boil an egg (to *be* an experienced cook), manage anger, love, social embarrassment, conflict (to *be* “that kind of” relational person), take choices and run risks (to *be* an agent), take care of a child (to *be* a good enough parent), organize our and others' work (to *be* a manager), to use a smartphone (to *be* cool and update)... in all these (and thousands other) examples of learning we were also learning presuppositions, i.e. the “how” and “why” and “with whom” and “what for”. We learn through (inter)action, experience, and conversations. And we build our identities (as shown in parenthesis). TL could be re-interpreted as a process of identity learning (Illeris, 2014)

Learning, hence, is a multiple, systemic and stratified phenomenon that involves biological, psychological, relational, situational, institutional, social levels. The common view of learning as happening inside the individual is too reductive. Learning happens in the space of life, and human life is social and communicative; its results are socially constructed as well as biologically rooted.

For example, in family learning, anybody learns how to be a child, parent, lover “in this family”, as a *local culture* and system of interrelations, and this is related to the body and its functioning on one side and to the wider social and cultural processes on the other side. In these complex multi-layered interrelated processes people learn about gender, roles and scripts, care, love and hate. These learning processes are trans-individual, as they belong to the individual as well as the collective subject (the “family”), they are interdependent. The biographical standard in Western cultures is based on singular stories, told by an individual artificially isolated from his/her living relational context. To understand learning in the family I need to understand the “proximal system” (meso level), defined as a network of inter-dependent recursive



relationships that come to define a “we-system”.

Learning is stratified and ubiquitous. Bateson (1972) labeled as “learning” the capacity to give the same answer to the same stimulus: Learning 0 is a form of learning, he stated, since it is the presupposition and the basis for all the other forms.

In Bateson's hierarchy of logical levels, Learning I is what we commonly define as “learning” in a variety of cases: habituation, Pavlovian conditioning, instrumental reward and avoidance, rote learning, extinction or inhibition of previous answers... He proposes an analogy with the laws of motion: if “position” or zero motion is Learning 0, then “motion” is Learning I and “acceleration” is Learning III. So:

*Learning I is change in specificity of response by correction of errors of choice within a set of alternatives.*

*Learning II is change in the process of Learning I, i.e. a corrective change in the set of alternatives [...] (Bateson, 1972, p. 293).*

“Learning to learn”, “transfer of learning”, “meta-cognition” and “reflexivity” belong to this level of learning, where the learner is brought to a different view, a “change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated” (ivi.), or “transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1991). Bateson also used the term “deuterolearning”. A living being who is raised in a Pavlovian context or an instrumental context will anticipate further contexts coherently with her experience.

“experience of one or more contexts of the Pavlovian type results in the animal's acting in some later context as though this, too, had the Pavlovian contingency pattern. Similarly, if past experience of instrumental sequences leads an animal to act in some later context as though expecting this also to be an instrumental context, we shall again say that Learning II has occurred” (Bateson, 1972, p. 294).

Following this theory, we must recognize that TL (if it corresponds to deuterolearning) can happen outside of conscious purpose. Educators, psychiatrists, anthropologists, parents are experts (maybe unaware experts) of deuterolearning, as they “must use in their thinking a variety of assumptions about Learning II” (ivi., p. 297). There are at least three cases where Learning II is at stake:

- the building of what we call “character” (Illeris 2014, TL as search for identity);
- the punctuation of interactions;
- the phenomena that psychoanalysis calls “transference” and “counter-transference”.

Learning contexts tend to be self-validating; hence, Learning II is “almost ineradicable” in Bateson's view; it digs deeply into early years; it is unconscious, but not “repressed” in Freudian terms: simply, it happens in corporeality and builds *habits*.

“Subjectively we are aware of our 'dependency' but unable to say clearly *how* this pattern was constructed nor *what cues* were used in our creation of it” (Bateson, 1972, p. 301, *italics are mine*).

Biographical research, by pointing to the “how” and cues of past experience, opens

space for *reflexivity* (second level of reflection) about learning and deuterolearning.

Learning III seems very rare. A change of premises can happen at level II, but level III entails a deep questioning of one's premises, a transformation of the whole personality, of the philosophy of life, like in conversion, illumination or deep healing. Learning III brings

“a greater flexibility in the premises acquired by the process of Learning II – a *freedom* from their bondage. [...] But any freedom from the bondage of habit must also denote a profound redefinition of the self”. (Bateson, 1972, p. 304).

After this kind of transformation, the concept of “self” seems to become less pivotal in the punctuation of subjective experience; as in some Zen stories or in Western mystics. Is this still TL, or should we address different levels of transformation?

### **Honoring life: what kind of research do we need?**

What is certainly true is that many (ethical, aesthetical, epistemological, cultural) presuppositions are involved in researching human learning. We become aware of them only in intercultural dialogue, i.e. when they are challenged. Research may implement processes aimed to systematically challenge our perspectives, hence to facilitate the researcher's TL.

Besides, we need forms of research that can honor and celebrate the systemic nature, complexity and even mystery of learning. Adult learning research is often focused on individual subjects, their achievements, their strategies and representations; this focus is culturally, socially, historically biased. The interplay of individual, social and situational determinants in learning needs to be celebrated by implementing new frameworks for research. In the systemic view, the composition of different sights or levels brings to a *double or multiple description*, as in binocular vision, that “adds an extra *dimension* to seeing” (Bateson, 1979, p. 78). Inter and trans-disciplinarity becomes highly desirable. Arts – literature, poetry, drama, painting, music - add another dimension to it. Multiple descriptions may bring forth a richer synthesis of different aspects and layers in human life, learning, experience.

“... our great universities believe there is such a thing as psychology which is different from sociology, and such a thing as anthropology which is different from both, and such a thing as aesthetics or art criticism [...] and that the world is made of separable items of knowledge in which, if you were a student, you could be examined by a series of disconnected questions called true or false quizzes – quiz-bits, as you might say. And the first point I want to get over to you is that the world is not like that at all – or, let us be more polite: the world in which I live is not like that at all...” (Gregory Bateson, in the movie “An Ecology of Mind”, by Nora Bateson, 2010)

Verbs such as “to honor”, “to celebrate”, do not belong to the common vocabulary of research, where no space is left for “systemic wisdom”, as Bateson named it. Disconnected knowledge produces effects on a global scale. Its *diabolic* work (*diaballein* in Ancient Greek means “separate”, “divide”) may be counterbalanced by symbolic actions (*syn-ballein*, “unify”), i.e. aesthetic representations where “the real stuff of life” is presented through stories (“thinking in terms of stories”, Bateson 1979,

p. 14) and split parts are re-harmonized. *Aesthetic knowledge* (presentational knowledge, Heron 1996) should be integrated in research, so as to bring it beyond mere description and explanation (even beyond words and wordly knowledge).

Another aspect of research is its partiality: human beings are able to represent only a *small part* of their complexity, but we do not need it to be reductive or overly simplified: it can be complex, like in holograms or miniatures. The “embodied narratives” (Formenti, West, Horsdal, 2014) that may be told here-and-now, during a conversation happening in a specific place and time, work as emerging complex objects created by and through interaction. There is a complex social system around any narration, of which we should be aware: questions are asked (or not), some power structure is always in place (the researcher or teacher, institutional roles), a material and symbolic space is created, with hidden unconscious dimensions (is it a safe enough space? West, 2014). This *situation* acts as a whole system of *codified information*; most of this stuff will remain unconscious, not least because it would be anti-economic to try to gain omniscient knowledge about it (a route to madness, probably).

The *ethical imperative*: “Act always so as to increase the number of choices”

The *aesthetical imperative*: “If you desire to see, learn how to act”. (von Foerster, 1984, pp. 60-61).

A systemic view of research calls for responsibility. A researcher has a position (Learning 0) in relation to his/her own search. Neutrality is not possible. Decisions are taken about the method, setting, ethical code... There is a personal side to it: the researcher's story, feelings, previous learning entail a set of presuppositions and interplay with the questions or stories he/she is working with (Merrill, West, 2009). Analysis and interpretation of data, in this context, calls for agency and responsibility:

“Autonomy implies responsibility: if I am the only one who decides how I act, then I am responsible for my action. Since the rule of the most popular game played today is to make someone else responsible for my acts – the name of the game is “heteronomy” - my arguments make, I understand, a most unpopular claim” (Foerster, 1984, p. 59).

Research may be interpreted as a context of human learning. It can open possibilities for Learning I, II and even III. It can cast some light on the constraints and structures that were built in the research procedures. Responsibility and agency of the researcher, as well as the participants, need reflexivity and critical thinking.

### **Art and dialogue: ways to honor stories and propitiate learning**

“By *aesthetic* [bias], I mean responsive to *the pattern which connects*. [...] *How are you related to this creature? What pattern connects you to it?*” (Bateson, 1979, p. 9).

Dialogic, multiple, reflexive ways of building knowledge (in training, research, and everyday life) can help to foster a complex view of adult learning, that entails the Other (researcher, participant, reader) as an *inside-observer* of the process of learning. In dialogic research, researchers and participants (and even readers) are actively involved in conversations, to build meaning through them. They are invited to honor

their differences and find ways to compose their sights.

A way to do that is through critical sharing of self-narration and the narration of experience, a human widespread activity, rooted in our biology and ubiquitous, as it was said above: by telling our stories we coordinate with each other and build shared meaning. Self-narrating answers to basic questions: “Who am I for you? Who are you for me?” Can (or should) I take care of you? Can I learn from you?

Unvoiced and unseen stories need to find their space. “Who” is a question that evokes uniqueness, recognition, freedom. “What” evokes categories, objectification, colonization of lives, acts against human becoming.

The relational dimension of narration is very strong in the European literary tradition. Poems of the ancient times built a culturally shared idea of the importance of interpersonal links: friendship, love, hate, carefulness, competition, trust... Hence, self-narration became a very common enactment of the self, a “technology” of the self (Foucault, ). The need to tell our story is equal only to the need of being told by the Other (Cavarero, 1994).

*“How can I know who I am, if I have not yet talked to anybody?”*

There are different ways to do dialogic research: co-operative research (Heron, 1996), duoethnography (Norris, Sawyer, Lund, 2012; Sawyer, Norris, 2013), art-based narrative and performative research (Gergen, Gergen, 2012), and biographical learning oriented cooperative inquiry (Formenti, 2005, 2008, 2012). These methods are aimed to implement specific forms of conversation and to raise qualitative “data”, to build trans-individual and trans-cultural knowledge about learning. They implement a learning experience themselves, as they involve adults learners in different settings (e.g. teachers, educators, parents, students in HE) in an exploration of their presuppositions about learning, its roots in experience, its subjective and cultural representations, and its practices.

Cooperative inquiry implements several cycles where lived experience, aesthetic representation, collective sensemaking and deliberate action are interconnected. This method, proposed by John Heron (1996), may be “biographically and learning oriented” when the lived experience of participants is explored through autobiographic writing. The four kinds of knowledge – biographic, symbolic, theoretical, practical (or: experiential, presentational, propositional, practical, see Heron, 1996) – are here composed in one and the same process. All participants are researchers.

Duoethnography is a recently developed method to build critical thinking starting from the researchers' experience and analysis of their cultures (family, school, institution, ethnic community, political group, etc.). The researchers involved are “persons of difference” (Norris, Sawyer, 2012): they search for a “double description” of the experience they are investigating, deeply questioned in view of avoiding any “master story” or “saturated story” that can emerge from a less critical process. The batesonian notion of information as *a difference that makes a difference* is here translated into a methodological tenet (Sawyer, Norris, Formenti, 2014).

Art-based research is not a method, but a large and diverse approach in qualitative inquiry entailing a more radical trans-disciplinary step. As an example, “creative life writing” (Hunt, 2013) in group settings with professionals is used to foster both reflection and reflexivity. As a form of aesthetic knowledge, it can also enter in cooperative inquiry and duoethnography. Art (images, drawing, photographs, video, dance, music, drama) can be proposed in auto/biographic research to provoke

narration, to sustain the development of (new) stories and meaning. It can propitiate reflexivity and TL, since it brings difference, abduction and deepness in the way a story is told.

These methods pose new problems of validity, reliability, generalization, but they are valuable as they produce deep critical insights, not only in the researcher, but in participants and potentially in the readers too, who become a part of the systemic process of research (Norris, Sawyer, 2012).

### **Evaluation of learning as a collective inquiry: TL in a course on Family Counselling**

*Another course has finished. I feel exhausted, but it was a good session. Students seemed glued to their chairs, not wanting to leave. There was so much thinking and talking in the last 3 hours... We tried to take out as much as possible from our understanding of what this course has been, has meant to all of us. We followed, once again, Heron's steps: first, contact your experience, by using auto-ethnographic writing to remember ("radical memory") that moment, in the last three months, when you had an insight, or a thrill, about some idea or experience. Then, each person in the room draw a symbol (some of them preferred to write a poem, a haiku) to represent the object – la res – of this course.*

*They have learnt to appreciate these moments, when all talking stops, and each student in the room works alone with the others in silent meditation to produce a piece of art, as an expression of his, her, imagination, emotions, mysterious thoughts. Is this "thinking"? Yes, I think so. It is the more ancient and wise form of thinking for the humankind. Art gives a form to some knowledge that is underscored by the academy, and so far from expectations that it needs to be re-discovered... learners have heart, soul, and a body. They are not only brains.*

*The spiral went on and on. After the step of aesthetic representation, students formed groups and discussed about their writing, their metaphors, shared ideas. We wrote on the blackboard all the concepts and connections they had done. Intelligent understanding (in Italian, it sounds more like intelligent comprehension, co-grasping).*

*And then, to close the cycle of cooperative inquiry, we had a discussion about "what's next"? What kind of action, or intention, comes from what I have experienced here, during this course? Can I use this understanding in my work, in my life?*

*If I like so much cooperative inquiry is because it really fosters reflection and reflexivity, as in this case. I had never thought, before today, to use it as a framework to assess my courses. But since it became my method for teaching, it was natural to use it also for evaluation.*

A good enough theory for learning must take into consideration its evaluation: how and when can we say that TL has occurred? Who is entitled to assess it, if not the learners? But how, in relation to which/whose aims, presuppositions, practices? TL as a theory prizes reflexivity and a critical view: can these features be implemented in a course, and in the process of evaluation of its outcome?

These questions were raised in relation to an evaluation session, held in december 2013, where an embodied, interpersonal and co-operative method was used in the

class to evaluate a course in Pedagogical Sciences (Family Counselling: theories and practices), whose explicit aim was to foster TL in the students. The brief auto-ethnographic text above tells the circumstances of this “experiment” where I decided to use cooperative inquiry and the notion of TL in final evaluation.

The pedagogy of the course (72 hours, 40-50 students) was based on the systemic view and the building of a collective Mind (Bateson, 1976) through co-operative based teaching (Heron, 1996; Formenti, 2008, 2009) that involved participants as researchers in:

- a) exploration of personal experience (experiential knowledge) about the themes of the course;
- b) self-narration, body pedagogy, creative writing and aesthetic languages (presentational knowledge);
- c) reflexive and critical thinking, hypothesization (Selvini, Boscolo, Cecchin, Prata, 1980) (propositional knowledge) and the building of a “satisfying theory” (Formenti, 2008);
- d) deliberate actions and projects (practical knowledge) related to professional experience.

The final lesson was organized as a huge exercise of collective evaluation (3 hours), where the 4 passages listed above were used to critically analyze the course and its outcomes. After the collective conversation, each student was invited to write a letter to the teacher, to voice his/her own ideas, hidden thoughts and criticisms in a more private way. 35 letters were gathered and analyzed.

A course in HE is a challenging experience of learning and teaching. An adult – the teacher – meets other adult learners, for a defined time and with defined constraints, with the task to foster their learning. Issues of power are always there. There is a content of the course, goals are fixed in advance, and learners are expected to develop their abilities, knowledge, competence, and – even if this is less recognized in university – identities, in a way that is very rarely self-determined.

The course of “Family counselling: theories and practices” is a part of the curriculum for Pedagogical Sciences, where students learn to become “pedagogists”: in Italy these professionals work in educational settings to foster, monitor, evaluate good practices, to sustain programs, to solve problems and offer consultation to other professionals (teachers, social workers), volunteer, parents, officials, to develop their educational roles and abilities.

It is a relational profession: the pedagogist needs to listen to the other's voice, needs, questions, and understand, legitimate, offer recognition to them, in order to be able to position him/herself in a useful way, both towards the individual and to the proximal system (the family in a wide sense). He/she also needs to be able to read the context, the cultural and institutional frameworks where his/her work is done (school, social service, community, tribunal, loisir...). Besides, there is a larger framework – society, historical moment, ongoing changes in the world – that needs to be taken into consideration. Since the course has a systemic view, all these different levels and frameworks are taken into consideration.

This brought me to consider TL as a legitimate goal for my teaching. Pedagogists have to do with a lot of frameworks. Very often, conflicting ones. They need to learn the “art of creative management of conflicts” (Sclavi, 2003) through a deep understanding of how frameworks work (ivi). TL offers some valuable insights on how adults learn to change their frameworks, and how to teach – or better foster – it. TL theory brings a distinction between the “simple” change of a set of ideas, that is not necessarily transformative, and the change of someone's ways to frame the world,

its objects (the “family”, for example), and oneself. What kind of clues can I use to say that my course brought to transformative learning? Is a text (a sentence, a letter, a statement in a conversation) able to convey this meaning?

*I remember the first lesson when you said that the objective of the course was to transform. At the beginning I hold fast, I was skeptical... I was scared when I realized how much some issues could touch me deeply... I asked to myself which other positions I could have taken in that situation...*

*[...] like a questioning, left suspended, a way to highlight one's points of view, a complex punctuation... sometimes difficult to be maintained and accepted, but able to create beauty in its own small way*

*... instead of giving concepts [the course] offered a way to manage them, instead of giving methods it gave ways to see things. Now I am much more confused than before, but feeling that I have the tools to satisfy my hunger for knowledge...*

*... it was like rough water... sometimes I bumped into rocks... I felt cold... it has been painful... now I recognize punctuations in me, in the other, and I feel blocked...*

*... sometimes I feel like a tree, well rooted in its ground, that needs stability, and fears the wind, since it could crack it... as a conclusion I will only say that for the first time I was able to intervene in the class...*

*... I was scared by uncertainty, by dilemmas, by questions that opened to other questions instead of receiving an answer. During this course I did not learn to accept uncertainty, but I began to reflect on the possibility to live with. Uncertainty is not insecurity, it is reflection, self-critique, silence...*

*... each time that I had to write... I realized that “my old patterns” always came out... last week for the first time I used another way to communicate... (Alessia)*

*The course left many open questions, and I hope I will find answers in the books*

These are qualitative data and require interpretative analysis, that is not yet completed, since a dialogic method will be used for it.

The well-known path of “good empirical research” asks to operationalize the concept, find a good way to measure it, collect evidences that the phenomena we are looking for have really happened. This is suggested by those who are working hard towards making TL accepted as a leading theory in adult education and who signal the critical aspects of this theory and research connected to it (Taylor and Laros, 2014, in press).

I am following here another path, starting from a different point of view, i.e. the meaning that subjects who are involved in the process of learning give to their experience. And I consider myself as one of those subjects. Who is entitled to say that there is (or not) TL? Learners themselves, but also other subjects who are involved in the process, i.e teachers, educators, researchers... They will see different things, in relation to their aims, presuppositions, practices, roles. Here is when a dialogic methods becomes of great importance.

The *insider's* view – the experience of TL seen from the perspective of the learner – and the critical view – that focuses frameworks - are difficult to be attained by

traditional evidence-based research. They require a different paradigm, more subjective and based on qualitative interpretative methods, and a context where learners can be actively involved and listened to. Positivistic and essentialistic operations – as described above - separate learning from research; besides, they need the action of a trained specialist who uses a specific jargon and tools, hence it would be quite difficult to involve learners in that kind of process.

I am looking for a way of doing research that can illuminate human experience. Qualitative methods seem to me apt to illuminate the complexity of TL and even helpful in developing the theory, to enrich its definition besides its overly cognitive and individual view.

### **Conclusions**

The paper offers some connections between TL (Mezirow, 2009; Taylor, 2009; Dirkx, 2006; Illeris, 2004), co-operative learning (Heron, 1996) and the systemic constructivist view (Bateson, 1972, 1976; von Foerster, 1973; Maturana, 1993; Maturana, Varela, 1985). TL is conceived as an embodied interpersonal activity, enacted in a social and language space. The composition of different views contributes to the development of a complex pedagogical theory and practice, that goes beyond learning specific contents or actions (this idea is already evident in TL as a theory), beyond the boundaries of the individual (this is less evident in TL, more in the systemic view), and beyond the reductionist idea of reflection as a *rational and conscious mental process* (one of the major critiques to TL) to build on the concept of reflexivity as the product of human conversation (as in cooperative inquiry and other forms of dialogical research).

A theory and practice of reflexivity defines learning as the composition of perceptions, actions, concepts, emotions and values, that transforms in relation to a context. This always entails the transformation of here-and-now relationships: playfulness, criticality, intentionality are features of learning that are revealed by signs of transformation in the student-teacher relationship.

This also helps to understand that TL is not “any form of adult learning”. As we have seen in Bateson's definition of *deuterolearning* or Learning2, it can happen only at enormous costs, when frameworks are challenged. Von Foerster argued that you can see your perspective only by taking another's perspective. TL needs a disorienting dilemma, a challenge, hence it is a menace to established ways of thinking. It is a really difficult experience, even scaring, as many of the letters show. Adults learners need a safe enough space to learn: they tend to rely on their (cognitive and emotional) habits, (practical) routines and rituals, and to satisfactory knowledge that offers some security. To leave the comfort zone, they seem to need a good enough, trusting relationship with the teacher and with knowledge itself.

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## **Knowledge creating conversations: endlessly unfolding inquiries of discovery and invention**

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### **Abstract**

Linking conversations, supervisory relationships, courses and conferences, community participation, empirical data collection and self-evident proofs, staff and student colleague's work together to craft feedback and associations into quests for originality. Fusing action research, design science, ethnography and grounded theory, knowledge creating conversation (KCC) narratives investigate global learning environments from January 2000 to the present. The research project outcome is The Arts–Science–Education–In–Performance (ASEIP) Model of Global Learning. ASEIP is a methodology for formulating experiments in knowledge creation. Activating the mostly untried, and untested, all round genius-self, actioning literacies transcripts (ALT) emerge when colleagues share ownership of research activities. In Conversation Studies (CS), authoritative pedagogies accommodate learner autonomy; and reductionist reasoning adopts expanding awareness.

Eight community projects, 57 KCC matrices, 10 supervisory relationships, 4500-plus citations, 55 ALT templates and 57 ASEIP evidentiary events explicate KCC narratives and their relationship to authority in educational settings and people's daily lives. This leads to the focusing hypothesis: in CS, individuals triangulate ASEIP global learning relativities (GLR) to investigate KCC narratives and ALT. And inspires the question: why does learner authority open conversations conceptualising educational entanglements? All participants in mainstream education are respondents to authority. Connecting learners of all abilities, ages, backgrounds and conditions, ASEIP grounds and foregrounds knowledge creating experiences, not in order to make colleagues agree but to enable immaculate exchanges. KCC and ALT break new ground, counteract constraints and successively approximate new understandings transitioning to the next stage of human development.

Anticipating authoritative theoretical and methodological antecedents in the literature, the research project reviews the work of Gandhi (knowledge creating), Aurobindo (educational models), Shaftsbury (genius systems), the Romans (communal reciprocity), Confucius (administrative systems), Dowling (academic meanings), Wittgenstein (pedagogical practice), Nanak (actioning literacies), Arendt (human condition), Cameron (spontaneous creativity), Campbell (experiment design), Comfort (life style), Csikszentmihalyi (sustaining faith-flow), Freire (social inclusion) Zeldin (conversation studies), the United Nations (global learning), Mezirow (transformation ideology) and the Ottomans (governance structures) among others. Claiming to be the authority in this original subject area, Conversation Studies amalgamate self-knowledge, cosmic consciousness, universal understandings and academic insights.

Nurturing integral values, trans-disciplinary, research journey colleagues utilise ASEIP humanistic, collaborative–conversational–creative methodology to establish how–what–why mainstream pedagogical practices undermine learner outcomes.

Sharing a sense of infinite probabilities being marginalized, learners of all abilities, ages, conditions and backgrounds are in conflict with perceived understandings of authoritative, hierarchic practice as a reified mode. The error is to treat controlling situations as the real thing: over investing in competitive learning environments because that is what is happening in the classroom. Retaining hierarchies of authority and advantage, bias, dogma, indifference and marginalizing inequalities colonise academe, the workplace and society. Human beings are powerful learners playing cosmic games of chance. CS, ASEIP, KCC and ALT convert emancipating events into GLR and transformative intergradient education systems (TIES).

Findings: CS, ASEIP, KCC and ALT reconcile individuality-authority, leadership-anarchy, wellbeing-conflict and responsibility-accountability anomalies.

Recommendations: Utilize CS, ASEIP, KCC and ALT to transition from the conflict to the next, wellbeing stage of human development.

**Evidentiary event** the paper is written in the form of a knowledge creating conversation narrative and actioning literacy transcript describing methodologies and arguments utilised at the Doctoral School, Institute of Education University of London from January 2000 through the present. The aim is (1) to amalgamate conventional and alternative mainstream educational methodologies, languages and arguments to enable learners of all abilities, ages, backgrounds and conditions to improve their performance; and (2) to generate evidence that will contribute to insuring that, someday, no human being is left behind, marginalised or excluded from educational provision. The Knowledge Creating Conversations Research Project supports the Education for All agenda that impacts the general public, educational institutions, teachers and students worldwide. The actioning literacies transcript template below outlines conventional and alternative methodologies discussed in the paper.

### **Experiencing Learners' Research Journey Roadmaps**

Signposting mainstream education pedagogies, practices and programmes

#### **Roadmap One: Constituting conversation studies (CS) methodologies**

##### **I Pedagogies**

- 1 Conversation
- 2 Collaboration
- 3 Creativity
- 4 Cooperation

##### **II Practices**

- 1 Believing in oneself enables genius doing, creating and experiencing
- 2 Believing in each other enables knowledge creating transformations
- 3 Believing in life enable the next stage of human development
- 4 Individual, mutual and communal intersections

##### **III Programmes**

- 1 Arts-Science-Education-In-Performance (ASEIP) Model of Global Learning
- 2 Knowledge creating conversation (KCC) narrative matrices
- 3 Actioning literacies transcript (ALT) templates and triangulating formulas
- 4 Nine universal elements of education (9UEE)
- 5 Transformative intergradient education systems (TIES) and joy
- 6 Accountability responsibility trust structures (ARTS)

7 Global learning relativities (GLR)

8 Dramaturgic docu-studies (DDS)

#### **IV Divergent thinking**

1 Conversations with self, others and nature

2 Inter-subjective reciprocities, commonalities and spontaneity

3 Six integral values, six learning environments

4 Faith-flow, still, silent calm and personhood voice inclusivity

#### **V Outcome inquiries**

1 Character-logical choices, leadership and changing consciousness

2 Incremental risk-taking involutions, intuition and spiralling events

3 Expanding awareness, diversifying adaptabilities and homeostasis

4 Sustaining wellbeing stage of human development achievements

### **Roadmap two: Revising reified, reductionist methodologies**

#### **I Pedagogies**

1 Authoritative

2 Hierarchic

3 Competitive

4 Controlling

#### **II Practices**

1 Never knowing enough imposter, undermining learner outcomes

2 Referencing authority, inhibiting independent self-expression

3 Retaining hierarchies of advantage and control

4 Bias, dogma, indifference and marginalising inequalities

#### **III Programmes**

1 Reductionist reasoning and beliefs

2 Reified academic narratives and facts

3 Warranted argumentation and authority-subject-object triangulations

4 Critical analyses and dialogic containment

5 Conflict dissolutions and boredom

6 Compartmentalising preconceptions and prejudices

7 Synchronising methodological disablements

8 Synthesising institutional entanglements

#### **IV Linear logic**

1 Charters, colonialism, corporations, capitalism, consumerism, conflicts (6Cs)

2 Objective-subjective dichotomies, oppositions and mind-sets

3 Jargonistic justifications and rationalizations

4 Fear-anger-pain and replicative voice exclusivity

#### **V Outcome constraints**

1 Ideological boundaries and philosophical barriers

2 Subject competitive convolutions and elitism

3 Obstructing independent learner authority, access and agency

4 Exploiting conflict stage of human development (CSHD) manipulations

**Experiencing the roadmap** ideas are based on empirical evidence and data collection from a lifelong career in social services and education at all levels of society in four countries United States, Canada, England and France. The aim is to contribute to mainstream educational provision especially as it impacts marginalized students. To achieve this objective, artistic, scientific and educational forms of expression are developed to support individuals seeking their own voice in academe. The research project is an ongoing public engagement with well documented impacts. Discoveries are made from continuing investigations, demonstrations, seminars and workshops.

Mainstream education integrates similar approaches, skills, knowledge, experience and values but in a more limited way. What is the nature of the evidence needed to make the case for alternative pedagogies, practices and programmes? What counts as evidence in academe? Evidence is different in different subject areas. The arts, science and education have different perspectives and objectives. The research subject validates the evidence and vice versa. Academic discourse is limited by the methodologies, language and arguments situated in academe. The paper defines methodologies that enable academic arguments in language that explicates mainstream education pedagogies, practices and programmes.

**Endless beginnings** each person has the inherent authority to express who they are. The poetic, personhood voice of the universal learner-self being all round genius; the Renaissance, poly math champion and hero speaks. Confronted by critical others, learners may choose to limit or avoid exercising their authority. Fending off the pressuring voices, asserting human equalities and rights in the privacy of their own mind, people are aware of how great they are. Pausing, still, silent calm interrupts what others are saying and what human beings repeat to them-selves over and over. What's the point of transformative learning? One answer is to avoid being an imposter responding to authority and never knowing enough. The emancipated, heroic learner confronts the unknown and learns relentlessly, courageously. The suppressed person withdraws. Acting independently, individuals access the competencies associated with knowledge creating conversation (KCC) narratives, actioning literacies transcripts (ALT), global learning relativity (GLR); and transformative intergradient education systems (TIES). Conversation Studies (CS) engage transformative learning in educational settings and people's daily lives.

The Arts-Science-Education-In-Performance (ASEIP) Model of Global Learning charts people experiencing nature, nurture and personal development on research journeys experiencing who they are from conception through grow to death to dust. Initial steps lead individuals to compose memoir stories describing experience experiments. Spontaneous creativity engages spiralling events on quests-in-process trajectories. Individuals link learning activities. Learner relationships with self, others and nature suggest conventional and alternative pedagogies, practices and programmes in mainstream education. Faith confronts the unknown. Constraints, inhibitions and fears ease their grip on self-expression. Opportunities arise for human beings to act. CS supports learners reconciling individuality-authority, leadership-anarchy, wellbeing-conflict and responsibility-accountability anomalies.

**Introduction** Human beings are continually changing consciousness. Self-expression accesses skills and being all round genius. CS embraces every person. ASEIP

establishes universally achievable educational entitlements: the arts are expression; science is measurement; education is exchange; and performance is movement. Knowing something about everything and everything about something is self-evident. Accessing the skills and genius available to everyone, individuals choose to work with who they are, experimenting with what they have to enhance their personal development. Considering every person is conditioned by cultural, social and psychological discourses, in one sense being framed is supportive of academic enterprise because it is protective. In another way, integrity is compromised by external structures that inhibit creativity and undermine learner outcomes. Evaluating the products of knowledge creating in institutional contexts, learning is enhanced by setting up events and experiencing diverse methodological pedagogies, practices and programmes.

In mainstream education, independent learners are interrupted by authoritative practices. Spontaneous individuals become self-conscious, student imitators. Human beings are microcosms of a universe that exudes spontaneity. Mainstream education constraints can be attributed, in part, to the lack of spontaneity afforded all participants at every level of provision. Self-revelation and individual authority transform disciplinarians into enthusiastic participants, mentors and sources of inspiration. Bias, dogma, indifference and marginalising inequalities cease being drivers of decision-making processes. ALT connects spontaneity, authenticity and originality. ASEIP is an innovative approach to formulating experiments in knowledge creation. Learners experience all round genius conducting experiments advancing the tasks most important to their survival and success.

Accessing dormant skills, exploring the unknown is graspable and doable. Faith and learning generate evolving tangible outcomes. Individuals experience previously unimagined confidence, competence, and fulfilment. Learners practice freedom when they make contributions to knowledge revising fluctuating boundaries of warranted argumentation. Learning from each moment, evidentiary events are empirically established. Events are naturally recurring phenomena exhibiting self-organization, self-similarity, repetition, feedback, order, irregularity, unpredictability, chaos and coupling. Spontaneous events assume original patterns and structures that emerge continuously in every animate and inanimate, nook and collaborative cranny of life. KCC narratives describe orderly and chaotic progressions moving from critical analysis and dialogic containment to dramaturgic docu-studies. Conversation Studies link:

- Survival values and human values
- Universal intimacy and protective responsibility
- Expanding awareness and diversifying adaptability
- Memoir stories and insight methodologies

Methodology ASEIP is based on self-knowledge, common knowledge, and subject knowledge. Linking self-knowledge and common knowledge with subject knowledge, issues of authority arise. ASEIP establishes the importance of each person's authority over their knowledge creating, methodologies, language and arguments. The conflict stage of human development (CSHD) continues to dominate world history. Proponents of CSHD claim existing systems are essentially permanent and unchangeable. Reductionist reasoning undermines the transition to the wellbeing stage of human development (WSHD). The question "What is the alternative" is asked

repeatedly. Alternatives exist. Implementing accountability, responsibility, trust structures (ARTS) enable daily review of CSHD and the transition to WSHD.

1) Knowledge creating skills development narratives are reflected, imagined and articulated in conversations with self, others and nature... and practical exercises.

Who am I – self-expression, memoir stories

Why, when, where – expanding awareness, continuing quests

With whom, which – diversifying adaptabilities, universal languages

What, how – actioning literacies, changing consciousness

2) In Conversation Studies, individuals access skills, discover being all round genius and engage their own voice. Education occurs in the cosmic world-body-lab-stage classroom. People write, direct and perform in their unique dramaturgic docu-studies.

Do > Create > Experience > Learn

3) ASEIP organises insight methodologies, changing perspectives, divergent thinking and endlessly unfolding inquiries of discovery and invention. Nine universal elements of education (9UEE) connect individuals with who they are and what they already know. Self-enabling methods produce material and immaterial contributions to knowledge.

Still > Silent > Calm > Creativity

4) Playing cosmic games of chance, ALT explicates reflective, imaginative, empirical research. TIES link formal and informal pedagogies with knowledge creating personal transformations. Personhood voice distinguishes the individual within their social milieu. The all-round genius-self is the main character in the cosmic-world-body lab-stage classroom.

Living and learning in the theatrical, trans-formative, real world, spontaneity, authenticity and originality are required to prosper. Nature, nurture and personal development are generational ingredients. Everybody has knowledge creating skills. Education is an opportunity for individuals to achieve peak performance and creative genius. Memoir stories and learning heroics immerse learners in joyful, emerging scenarios about what they want to do, create and experience. Still, silent calm and universal intimacy author ALT. Scientific formulas calibrate changing objective, subjective and inter-subjective perspectives. Involution subsumes revolution in experience experiments.

Emergent cultures self-evident, universal empirical evidence Social inclusion retains *qualities of inter-dependence and self-reliance, beginning in childhood and extending throughout a person's life. The assumption that survival is competitively contested accommodates communal reciprocity. Regardless of social position, hierarchic pecking orders operate within authoritative and controlling families, communities, school, education, the workplace and societal institutions. Globally, gaps separate lower, middle and upper echelon elites and the masses. Moving up and down the ladder of participation is imagined as a possibility despite ability, age, background, and condition and individual circumstances. Protected and resourced elites are more likely candidates for a secure place in society. Jockeying for recognition and attention is a blood sport. A doctorate purchases a first class ticket to dream destinations. For adept, aggressive, driven hurdlers, mainstream education is gratefully remembered in*



*reunions with graduated classmates. Doctoral students enter uncharted waters reserved for individuals recognised by society as super learners and achievers. The research project investigates what occurs when dramatic changes envelope doctoral students embarking on research journey roadmaps in emergent cultures of learning.*

Dramaturgic docu-study investigates character, risk, interference and incremental change...caring, learning, working and being creative...laughing, loving, dancing, singing and expressing who you are. KCC narratives have to do, inter alia, with authoritative, hierarchic systems where some people inhabit actual kingdoms and rigorously control them while others experience disadvantage and violence. The next thing is academe, and formal education, have always been part of supporting and prolonging authoritative systems. And in this way, academe replicates social, economic, political and military hierarchies. Conversations studies publicly engage alternatives to reified, reductionist methodologies.

CS develop KCC narratives with oneself, others and nature. The conversations dramatize learners' changing consciousness. Learners write, direct and act in their memoir stories. ASEIP, KCC and ALT connect personal, activist and academic learning paradigms. Expanding awareness invites learning encounters with everyone and everything.

Families, friends, colleagues and planetary citizens assemble dramaturgic docu-studies from fractal-metric art forms envisioning clouds, coastlines and mountain ranges, snowflakes, lightning bolts and artworks. The lab-stage classroom incubates individuals' deepest longings for self-esteem, identity, knowledge and integrity. In performance, scenarios frame memoir stories scripting synchronous spontaneity. Poetic, personhood voice narrates modern dilemmas. On stage, families, friends, colleagues and citizens form enlightened, integral, learner relationships. Persuasion-coercion-consent catharses germinate dynamic, educational, ecological settings where being alive is more important than being correct. Renaissance persons emerge making the most of whom they are.

Six global learning environments support KCC and ALT: 1) Cosmic-World-Body-Lab-Stage Classroom; 2) Artworks-In-Progress Studio 3) Knowledge Creating Café; 4) Quests-In-Process Trajectories; 5) Conversations Transformation Theatre; and 6) Projects-In-Development Home-base. Accountability, responsibility trust structures (ARTS) contextualise what people do and societal systems. Universal understanding enlightens dogmatic practices. Peace, kindness and justice calm fear. Nature and human nature collaborate to create sustainable wellbeing systems. CS, ASEIP, KCC and ALT develop skills learners utilise collaboratively and cooperatively. Revising fluctuating boundaries of warranted argumentation, outcomes are empirically established in evolving, spontaneous, experiential demonstrations. Learning from each moment, the moment responds in dramaturgic docu-studies. In CS, individuals choose to make unique contributions to the arts, science and education. ALT are based on reflection, imagination and action inscribed while pausing to understand, speak and record what is occurring. ALT uses words that connect daily experiences and historical events.

**Antithesis revised** Six hundred years ago, in Europe, elites, becoming wealthy, established societal systems that secure and increase their wealth. ARTS emerge but fail to mature. Charters, colonialism, corporations, capitalism, consumerism and conflicts dominate society. Individuals are oppressed by the systems including the

education system, and societies are indoctrinated into the syndrome. Individuals with spirit end up in knowledge creating conversations incrementally changing societal systems. Those whose spirit is broken end up captive to the syndrome. Despite systems interference, persons dispel syndrome attributes to challenge violent events that impede progress. CS pedagogies, practices and programmes revise historical events.

After inspiring what become European cultural traditions, the enlightened, Islamic Moors, Golden Age 711 to 1492 AD, are expelled from Spain. Lessons concerning the collapse of 3rd millennium BC, Sumerian society, are ignored. African scholarship and achievements are misrepresented rationalising the slave trade and exploitation of an entire continent. Advanced Indian civilisations, providing solutions to societal problems for 7,000 years, are plundered. Rejecting mono cultural oppression, seven million Papua New Guineans speak 850 indigenous languages communicating across almost as many traditional societies. Amidst serial invasions, Egyptian engineering supremacy surpasses by 4500 years more recent examples of technological progress. Among six original great civilisations, China counteracts 19<sup>th</sup> century opium war invasions.

Abandoned Greek agora–asclepiad–academy lifestyles, 2500 years old, promote the well–being of urban societies. Mimicking Greek City States, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Greenwich Villagers in New York City are the fountainhead for North American culture. Roman 1200 year civilization integrates systems for enhancing individual, mutual, communal and cultural participation. Forgotten Ottoman Empire, 1299 to 1923, pluralistic, millet forms of governance preserve multi-cultural group autonomy. Victimised indigenous populations, live in relative harmony with nature and human nature. Counteracting society's religious–historical–philosophical–dialectal–educational dogma, some countries–Finland, cultures–Sikh, persons–Gandhi, institutions–United Nations and businesses–cooperatives sustain their integrity. Managing systems interference, individuals transform what they are being told and what they are telling themselves. Asking who am I? People envision the next stage of human development.

**Changing contexts** Doctoral School, doctoral student, doctoral research and doctoral thesis connote the highest level of study attainable. Insight methodologies focus moments of inspiration. Doctoral theses are sequentially structured but metamorphic in scope. The Doctoral School learning environment acculturates ground-breaking discoveries. Vulnerable, exposed, powerful doctoral student declarations of principle, courses of study, research proposals and community initiatives emerge synthesising institutional entanglements. Constituting CS methodologies, GLR enable Doctoral School staff and students and research participants to revise the value, and necessity, of deferential investment in authority.

The Doctoral School licenses doctoral students to make original contributions to knowledge. Learning assumes revolutionary trajectories. Individual quests for knowledge are fulfilled through daily learning activities in TIES. Inter-subjectivity recognises the self and the other in learner relationships. Demonstrating research outcomes focuses on educational settings in the home and community, in schools and at work; in society and the media. New syntheses of expected educational experiences are achieved. Reviewing what is most important to each person collaborators recognise who they know themselves to be. Gathering evidence, individuals choose between what they are being told and what they tell themselves.

The dramaturgic docu–study play, “Knowledge Creating Conversations,” asks three

questions in three acts of three scenarios introducing 9UEE. Act one, who am I? Scenario: (UEE1) self-expression; (UEE2) experience experiments; (UEE3) memoir stories; Act two, why, when, where? Scenario: (UEE4) spiralling events; (UEE5) spontaneous creativity; (UEE6) continuing quests; Act three, what, how? Scenario: (UEE7) universal languages; (UEE8) learner relationships; and (UEE9) learning activities. Discordant notes and concordant melodies compose themes, variations on themes and codas.

Planned and carried out initially in the Doctoral School knowledge community for staff and student colleagues, GLR and TIES are demonstrated in theatrical settings utilising improvisation, audience participation and performance art.

- Learning moment-to-moment
- Improvising intellectual constructs
- Connecting insights and aspirations
- Catalysing curiosity and choice

Signposting mainstream education pedagogies, practices and programmes shift the focus from critical analysis and warranted argumentation to creating new ways of thinking, living and learning. Publicly assessing people's capacity to express their authority develops evidence-based collaborations establishing:

- Educational experiences permeate the lives of every person on the planet
- People universally want to understand and adapt to a changing world
- Programmes by and for community residents, in the real world, are essential

The KCC research project utilises referential texts, warranted arguments and common knowledge; collaborative conversations, peer reviews and self-knowledge to evaluate Doctoral School staff and students and research participant experiences linking:

- Survival values and human values
- Universal intimacy and protective responsibility
- Expanding awareness and diversifying adaptability
- Memoir stories and evidence gathering methodologies

**Conversation Studies Manifesto** Human beings are powerful learners and champions on research journeys, transforming what they know moment-to-moment. Living and learning are statements of intent and commitments to lead a fulfilled and joyous life. Utilising 9UEE to create knowledge, individuals' learning trajectories constitute a manifesto. Spontaneous interactions produce subsequent frames and framings of time, space and form, one nested within the other. Learning is a personal, professional and public artwork-in-progress, raising questions about control and content. Sharing a sense of possibilities being marginalized, learners' curiosity and choice catalyse creativity. Learner autonomy emancipates self-expression. Socratic dialogues engage lifetime human dilemmas: social inclusion, economic entrepreneurship and political participation; individual fulfilment, mutual benefit and communal reciprocity. These experiences come into conflict with perceived understandings of reified, reductionist pedagogies, practices and programmes and

societal syndromes.

The capacity of human beings to construct TIES is an indication of the will to be fully engaged transitioning from CSHD to WSHD. Infinite probabilities challenge structural rigidities: humanistic pedagogy grounds and foregrounds learner integrity not in order to register agreement but to enable immaculate exchanges. The CS Manifesto establishes egalitarian relationships and 9UEE synthesise institutional entanglements. Being the research event and sharing authority, colleagues share ownership of educational activities and outcomes. Reciprocal understandings successively approximate individual and collective contributions to civilising society. GLR are based on strategies utilised in doctoral education and accessible to all learners.

Preoccupied with quests-in-process, doctoral students, independently, and with the support of supervisors, identify the boundaries of self-expression, originality, spontaneity and authenticity. Becoming conversant with diverse understandings of originality, doctoral students are acculturated into academic practices. Individual research projects become meta-reflections on staff and student experiences producing a doctoral thesis. Coherence is rigorously brokered: testing changing perspectives; obtaining testimony from supervisors, teachers, fellow doctoral students and research participants; formulating theories to explain what has happened and is happening; pointing the way to endlessly unfolding enquiries; and designing theorems to successively approximate transitory conclusions. The ends, graduation and career advancement are momentarily forgotten in a blaze of investigatory rigour and personal satisfaction. Under pressure, original ideas may mix unfavourably with the need to streamline thesis structures. Successful graduates defer consideration of what is lost.

**Transitioning from student to colleague** Doctoral students are authors, researchers, teachers, performers, marketers, mediators, directors, brokers and learners connecting with other learners in the Doctoral School knowledge community. The roles of staff and student, teacher and researcher blur to form colleague relationships. Human beings witness and master the conversations needed to communicate new educational experiences from the earliest age. During episodic events, doctoral students acquire the art of achieving educational ascendance. Epistemological praxis transforms ontological experience. Hyper kinetic data collection amalgamates formative, informative and trans-formative exchange for artistic and scientific affect. The human tendency to partner collaborative learner relationships and share ownership of the outcomes is developed in Doctoral School.

Doctoral student entitlements challenge notions of what constitutes learning and career advancement. Considering every person is conditioned by cultural, social and psychological discourses, in one sense being framed is supportive of academic enterprise because it is protective. In another way, integrity is compromised by external structures that inhibit creativity and self-expression. Doctoral student super learner, super achiever status enhances their ability to transition from student to colleague and from CSHD to WSHD. The shift from passive participants in mainstream educational settings to activist, change agents in Doctoral School invites crisis. Doctoral student research pursuits offer unprecedented access to all levels of society. The approach and attitude of doctoral students is transferable to other settings. Although societal interventions are supervised, sponsorship by the Doctoral School provides legitimacy and credibility. Doctoral students have the opportunity to contribute to: a) formal, informative, planned, research activities, b) informal,

spontaneous, formative exchanges and c) transformative, intergradient relationships with staff and student colleagues and research participants. Invitations to participate in international investigations present themselves.

When so much is contested in society, academic dialogues rescue researchers from unwelcome intrusions. Space and time are available to resolve philosophical and ideological conflicts and conundrums. The antidote for academic argumentation and survival of the fittest is proposed: expanding awareness and diversifying adaptability. Authoritative objectivity, subjective explication and inter-subjective exchanges coalesce when research outcomes are freed of reified, reductionist methodologies. Support is found for developing new approaches to constructing KCC narratives that fulfil the requirements for producing a doctoral thesis. Research journey roadmaps describe CS methodologies. KCC and ALT explore what research participants know, are learning and understand to be the research question, methodology and outcomes. Adventures and misadventures articulate global learning relativities and enrich the learning process.

Open, textured intellectual landscapes minimise the effect of ideological boundaries and philosophical barriers. Subject competitive convolutions and elitism recede in importance. The inter-subjective, anecdotal, inspirational core of doctoral students' purpose for pursuing doctoral research sustains WSHD achievements. The chaos and order, on which creativity depends, require homeostasis. Conflict dissolutions and boredom undermine academic discourse. The contest for intellectual allegiance continues while choices are being made. The shift from ALT to critical analysis alienates the researcher from research participants. Minimal collaboration with research participants on research projects is one reason for instantiating ethical boundaries. Evidence gathering is a contentious, context-driven, intellectual exercise. Appreciation of the compromises increases when further involvement with research participants is required. Conflicts and differences of opinion occur. Correspondence with academic authority culminates in doctoral student graduation. KCC and ALT are a marbled mixture of authoritative assertions and references, quantifications and qualifications.

**Questioning preconceptions** the authoritative foundation for the mainstream education system is rarely questioned. Practices are discussed. Education programmes are person centred. But hierarchic structures remain in place. Even at the pinnacle of the mainstream education pyramid, no one seems to know who the ultimate source of authority really is. Believing in an external authority hinders character-logical choices and incremental risk-taking. The silence, born of fear; filters through childhood innocence, parental acquiescence and teacher acceptance all the way to doctoral education. Academic and career prospects for those labelled educationally under achieving, disaffected or unfit, are curtailed. The beneficiaries of liberated self-expression are those fortunate enough to find a safe educational haven while juggling independent thinking, graduation requirements and long-term expectations.

In Doctoral School, administrative requirements for completing a doctoral thesis curb the initial enthusiasm of doctoral students interested in pursuing personal and community-based, work-related research agendas and self-actualising, emancipating theses. Overarching impediments compete with brilliant, independent enterprise. Final decisions are negotiated with supervisors necessarily more interested in the nuances of academic debate and satisfactory progression towards graduation than doctoral student research breakthroughs. In the background, ownership of ideas and competition for recognition continues. In times less pressured than the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

perhaps conventional supervisory guidelines are adequate to steward most doctoral students through the knowledge creating process. Today, educational institutions contend with societal breakdowns and abrupt administrative and budgetary transitions. Doctoral School staff and students and research participants make incremental compromises leading to previously unimagined contradictory choices impacting their wellbeing and the wellbeing of fellow citizens and communities worldwide.

The mainstream education system is understandably protective when distancing itself from divisive issues. Doctoral students borrow institutional authority to make original contributions to knowledge. Steps up social, economic and political ladders coincide with educational performance. Censure is threatened when innovative subject matter and unconventional methodological choices move too far from accepted norms. Doctoral students recognise activist causes will be considered academically unsound. In Doctoral School, achieving a PhD is far from assured. Failed doctoral students proceed from the closed corridors of academe to the street like refugees. Proposing alternatives to existing pedagogies, practices and programmes requires conversations with learners at all levels of attainment, cross-culturally and internationally. Mainstream education shortcomings are rigorously defended. Doctoral School staff and student colleagues maintain the scholarly dream of discovery and social benefit as long as possible. Those immediately responsible to student audiences are limited in their ability to impact events. Critical analysis calms disputation without resolving concerns. Expert observers assess points of tension and increase the intensity of the debate only to create short-lived, non-productive outcomes.

The passage from immature thinking to sophisticated evaluation about controversial topics, achieves coherence in Doctoral School. The linguistic facility needed to negotiate intellectual intervention is constrained by a lack of institutional transparency. In adverse conditions, self-interest transposes self-knowledge. Academe insists that referential, authoritative subject knowledge subsume activist aspirations and self-knowledge. Debates about academe's constitutional mandate to make commitments to community development are abbreviated. Seemingly powerless to reshape learning environments, those aspiring to positions of leadership are frustrated.

**Determinant actions** Human beings advance the tasks most important to their survival and success in life. Determinant actions are necessary to being a functioning, contributing person in society. Utilising 9UEE, GLR and TIES, the KCC research project examines doctoral education in relationship to leading a fulfilled and joyous life. Doctoral School staff and students and research participants constitute an emergent culture. Determinant actions develop identity, beliefs and lifestyle. Empirical evidence is a catalyst for theoretical thinking. GLR and changing consciousness explicate formative exchanges. Cultures of learning resonate with aesthetic and humanitarian values. Academe accesses opportunities to reconcile spiritual, sensual and intellectual conflicts in society. Chaotic and orderly, theatrical forums scaffold experience experiments. Improvisation connects what people know and the unknown. Audience participation pulls people together, giving voice to their aspirations. Performance art orchestrates communal artistic, scientific and educational adventures.

Exclusion is difficult to accept in the lives of people already under pressure, in a world that is driven by conflicts. Moment-to-moment is the most realistic context for exploring the impact of expanding participation. Reaching beyond routine patterns of behaviour, determinant actions place responsibility in the hands of the individual.

TIES support people exploring how learning works for them. Learners' continuing quests are reflections on life cycle experiences. Lower–middle–upper echelon elites and marginalised people are universally intimate, cosmic companions. Everybody is somebody, a player and a winner. Education is the stage. Life is the drama. Every person is the subject in his or her memoir story, the most essential epic they will ever write, read and speak. Reasoning–intuiting connects the conceptual–actual. Examining values, principles and beliefs across societies, learners' sense common cause, verify civic virtues and find respect for who they are. Today's open, global, public discourse is a rare educational moment in history. The mainstream education system constrains autonomous learning activity. Inspired, KCC narratives fuse what is required in mainstream education with what is enjoyable closing the gap between learner autonomy and achievement.

**Continuing conclusions** Western societies, with democratic traditions and educational resources; are responsible, globally, for initiating unsustainable policies, systems and lifestyles. Doctoral student and research participant entrepreneurs make contributions to society through careers in academe and other professions supplying research skills constrained by the need to develop marketable outcomes. Academe nurtures societal resolutions for seemingly irreconcilable conflicts. Learning together, doctoral students and research participants gain insight into what they need to do to create a better quality of life. Doctoral education is trans-formative because doctoral students open themselves to knowledge creating activities. Doctoral education prepares the ground for choosing between educational practices deriving from conventional and alternative methodologies.

The success or failure of the Doctoral School enterprise rests on the willingness of doctoral students to compromise some of what they value most when they begin the research journey: the integrity of their original research project. Negotiations continue with Doctoral School staff throughout the Doctoral School experience. Doctoral student attempts to advance self-determined, independent approaches to doctoral research lead to personal turmoil. Reputation and career objectives are affected. Failure to make good progress is too painful to contemplate. Doctoral student soul searching is ongoing. Blending in is a measure of personal power and strength. Learning encounters are daily occurrences involving everyone a person meets and everything they do, say and think. In the cosmic–world–body lab-stage classroom, GLR is spontaneous, envisioned and planned: (1) catapulting objects, forms, images, words, ideas, concepts, emotions and mind-sets through time zones, existential realities, physical environments and metaphysical contexts; (2) linking families–friends–colleagues–planetary citizens in time, space and form to configure metamorphic learning encounters, links and loops; (3) engineering KCC through learning activities cooperating with people, places and things; (4) investigating the meaning of personal, professional, public, cultural and historical artefacts; and (5) forming learner relationships that sustain WSHD achievements.

## Appendices

**Knowledge creating conversation (KCC)** narrative matrices are schematic patterns that chart doctoral student and research participant conversations with self, people and nature. Matrices structure collaborative relationships utilising universal elements of education. The matrices chart and catalyse subsequent collaborative conversations. The conditions that produce matrices emerge in doctoral student research projects.

The matrices organise educational experience into web-like themes, fractal metric compositions and triangulating mind-maps. Educational entanglements are investigated in conversations occurring during learning encounters. Universal languages provide feedback evaluating the words and ideas, music and mathematics, physical expressions and emotional energy that focus continuing conversations. The matrices connect metamorphic learning loops and sequential learning links. Fifty-seven matrices are organized into four categories.

- Fifteen lifetime-learning matrices: paradigms, methodologies, glossary, pedagogy, triangulations, narrative, hierarchy, exercise, laws, warrants, structure, emergence, background, process and history
- Twelve action-progression matrices: perspectives, methods, code, activist, activities, caring, democracy, resolutions, stories, comparison, voices and course
- Fourteen learner-self matrices: identities, dialectics, evolution, charter, transformation, catalyst, power, unknown, theories, thesis, portfolio, form, introspection and subjects
- Fifteen transition-exchange matrices: creativity, education, person, exchange, questions, sequent, experience, syncretisation, construction, achievement, criteria, centre, implementation, symmetrical and roles

The matrix represented below is utilised to structure and inspire collaborative conversations. The matrices are replicated and evolve through the participation of doctoral students and research participants.

#### KCC NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE MATRIX

*Being all round genius*

$$\infty L = e (a)^2$$

$$\text{Learning} = \text{energy (awareness)}^2$$

Learning criteria	energy characteristics	awareness qualifications
Investing equation	catalysing equation	synergising equation
<i>Learning=integrityXcompetency<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>energy=meaningXcontrol<sup>2</sup></i>	
<i>awareness=creativityXchoice<sup>2</sup></i>		
Personal learning paradigm	activist learning paradigm	academic
learning paradigm		
Learning reality	self-fulfilling authority	synchronising
action points		
<i>Point-pattern-progression</i>	<i>time-space-form</i>	
<i>translating-transacting</i>		
Transformative exchange	formative exchange	informative
exchange		
Self-knowledge	common knowledge	subject
knowledge		
Learning intuition	self-generating agency	leading
reciprocity		
<i>Sense-essence-presence</i>	<i>connecting-generating-participating</i>	



*transitioning-transcending*

Learning person progression	self-expressing autonomy	genius
<i>Intuition-imagination-inspiration synthesis</i>	<i>curiosity-choice-chance</i>	<i>being-becoming</i>
Learning relationship outcome	energy product	awareness
<i>Insight methodology</i>	<i>episodic evolution</i>	<i>changing perspective</i>
<i>Knowledge creation praxis</i>	<i>ontological experience</i>	<i>epistemological</i>

**Six integral global learning values** are guidelines, beliefs, advice, suppositions and proposals for determining how people behave in different situations. The ASEIP Model of Global learning encompasses the values of people locally and globally.

- Structures: wellbeing systems, accountability, responsibility and trust; self-common-subject knowledge and sustaining faith-flow
- Dimensions: expanding awareness and diversifying adaptabilities; reductionist reasoning and upper, middle and lower echelon elites
- Perspectives: evolving points, patterns, progressions and processes; all round genius-self and spiralling events and involutions
- Emphases: changing cultures, societies and systems; infinite probabilities, insight methodologies and spontaneous creativity
- Foci: objective, subjective and inter-subjective learner relationships; continuing quests, universal languages
- Realities: actioning literacies; learning relativities, transformative intergradient education systems and endlessly unfolding inquiries of discovery and invention

**Six global learning environments** Global learning relativity and wellbeing experiences amalgamate improvisation, audience participation, performance art and continuing quests. In ASEIP, participants believe in themselves, value their individuality and author, direct and act in memoir stories. Engaging six educational settings, knowledge creating transformations enable the transition from the Conflict to the next, Wellbeing Stage of Human Development.

- Cosmic-World-Body Lab-Stage Classroom
- Artworks-In-Progress Studio
- Knowledge Creating Café
- Quests-In-Process Trajectories
- Conversation Transformations Theatre
- Projects-In-Development Home-base

Nine universal elements of education (UEE 1-9)

Act One Collaborating communications Who am I? Organizing elements *order changing perspectives* and knowledge creating processes.

Scenario one UEE1 Self-expression *accesses personhood voice* doing, saying and thinking, being and becoming.

Scenario two UEE2 Experience experiments *engage questions* testing, discovering, inventing and dreaming.

Scenario three UEE3 Memoir stories *inspire understanding* immersing in the past, moment-to-moment and future.

Act Two Expanding awareness Why, when, where? Generating elements *evolve revolutionary originality* and emancipating choices in reciprocal resolutions.

Scenario one UEE4 Spiralling events *catalyse curiosity* engaging the unexpected, unknown and imagined moment-to-moment.

Scenario two UEE5 Spontaneous creativity *energises choice* acting imaginatively, intuitively, autonomously and authoritatively.

Scenario three UEE6 Continuing quests *emancipate authenticity* aiming and achieving today, yesterday and tomorrow.

Act Three Diversifying adaptabilities What, how? Fusing elements *integrate insight methodologies* and what was, what is and what is to come creatively.

Scenario one UEE7 Universal languages *focus communication* using arts, science, education, intuition, energy, comedy, tragedy, performance, words, ideas and images.

Scenario two UEE8 Learner relationships *co-create awareness* cooperating, communing, giving, receiving, sharing, collaborating, resolving and reciprocating.

Scenario three UEE9 Learning activities *synthesise transformative intergradient discoveries* interacting, connecting, participating, establishing, demonstrating and studying.

Accountability responsibility trust structures (ARTS) generate new forms of educational experience. Participants create what they are seeking to understand. Faith in the unknown tests what people know and their knowledge creating skills. Participants celebrate research journeys utilizing everyday language articulating shared values. Human beings learn about each other when they experience universal intimacy. Utilizing ARTS human equalities and rights are guidelines for developing strong relationships. KCC narratives successively approximate new understandings. Hierarchies of authority and advantage hinder the assessment of all round genius. To assess individual, group and team performance, those being assessed and observers contribute to assessment exercises. Calibrating learner authority, person, peer and practitioners evaluate educational achievements. Beginning with the individual, families and communities, KCC narratives acquire meanings unique to each person. Adding social inclusion, economic entrepreneurship and political participation, individuals assess their performance based on what they are achieving and their aims. KCC calibrate individual fulfilment, mutual benefit and communal reciprocity. Peak performances in academe, the workplace and society are signs of wellbeing.

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**The process of transformation:  
Kegan's view through the lens of a film by Wenders**

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**Abstract**

The aim of this workshop is the exploration of Kegan's constructive-developmental theory through the analysis of Wenders's film *Alice in the Cities*, which is used as a case study. In the first part, we will approach Kegan's ideas regarding the evolution of human beings' consciousness as they move through five progressively more complex orders of consciousness. We will also approach the connections of Kegan's perspective to Mezirow's 'transformation theory'. Then, we will draw insights from the film in order to expand the exploration of some crucial issues of Kegan's theory, such as: How is a person's consciousness developed? Is it a linear or a spiral process? Are there signs, when a person is situated in a certain order of consciousness, that he/she has the potential to move toward a next one? Which are the challenges and the 'immunities'? Which might be the adult educator's role in assisting the learners' evolutionary process?

**Kegan's theoretical perspective**

Robert Kegan's constructive-developmental approach describes the way in which human beings gradually construct their understanding of reality. He argues that this process is developed in five stages or orders of consciousness throughout a person's life course. Each one of these stages is characterized by a growing maturity and integrity regarding the way we make sense (Kegan, 1982, 1994). Each qualitative movement from one stage to the next requires a whole mental structure that had been experienced as *subject*, in the sense that we were "identified with, embedded in and fused with our ideas" (Kegan, 2013, p.3) and shifts it so that it becomes seen as an *object*, meaning we become objective towards our assumptions, reflect upon them, see what is true and exercise control over them.

The first order of consciousness roughly covers the time period from the second to the sixth year of life. Within this stage, we perceive reality through imaginatively constructed lenses. Our thinking tends to be "fantastic and illogical, our feelings impulsive and fluid" (Kegan, 1982, p. 29). In other words, we are not able to construct a logical relation between cause and effect, and we are attached to whatever is present at the moment.

During the second stage, which is common to adolescents, we develop a sense of who we are and what we want. We organize our desires as things that persist through time. In the 'social-cognitive' domain we are shortsighted self-oriented and we manipulate others to achieve our own goals (Kegan, 1986). Our challenge to develop further involves not to be mostly concerned with our own desires, but to take into consideration the expectations and needs of others.

During the third stage (the end of the teenage years and beyond), we make commitments to communities of people and/or ideas. Our sense of self, our assumptions and values derive from our relation with the others and they are constructed in terms of their respective points of view. We subordinate our individual interests to the shared norms, expectations and demands of the community to which we belong (peer group, family, social group etc.). Our challenge at this stage takes the form of resisting codependency and establishing independent ways of making meaning and behaving.

At the fourth stage, we have the capacity to take responsibility of our internal authority and make human relationships a part of our world. We can elaborate circumstances and expectations of others synthetically, and – in the light of our value system – (re)define our behavior in a functional way, toward our emancipation. In other words, we see ourselves as the author of our inner psychological life.

Finally, at the fifth stage, which according to Kegan (1994) is rarely reached, individuals are less likely to see the world in terms of dichotomies. They deal well with managing the tension of opposites (Berger, 2013). They recognize the partiality that is inherent in any system of beliefs and they have the capacity to make holistic sense of their experience and hold on to multiple systems of thinking.

A crucial component of Kegan's view is his understanding regarding the texture of the changes that occur across the constructive-developmental process (Kegan, 2000). In each stage, there is change in *what* we know – that is further learning of informative sort – but also change in *how* we know. The latter does not only provide new information, but causes a reconstruction of our preexisting frame of mind or an epistemological paradigm shift. According to Kegan (2000) only this sort of learning is transformational and leads the individual to a next order of consciousness.

Another core point of Kegan's theory concerns the very process within each stage of development. Actually, there is a continuous process of misbalancing and restoring the balance, a formation and reformation of our frame of mind, a setting and resetting of the distinctions between what is subject and what is object (Kegan, 2013). Hence, while we move from one order of consciousness to the next, we are placed in a fully transitional state where we may experience both orders at the same time. Also, we eventually tend toward the next order but we may also regress, finding ourselves embedded in the norms of the previous one. This spiral and dialectical process has been eloquently described by Kegan in his *Subject-Object-Interview Guide* (2013). He identifies twenty one possible distinctions in the on-going evolution of subject-object relations. For instance, passing from stage 3 to 4 involves four distinctions: 3 (4), where the person is situated mainly at the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage but there are indications in the behaviour demonstrating that she is beginning to move towards the 4<sup>th</sup> stage; 3/4, when this tendency is reinforced; 4/3 when the person behaves mostly according to the characteristics of the 4<sup>th</sup> stage and less according to those of the 3<sup>rd</sup>; 4 (3), when the person seems ready to move to the 4<sup>th</sup> stage, however some inner forces still hold her back.

### **The connections of Kegan's view to transformation theory**

The transformation theory has been introduced by Jack Mezirow since the late 1970s and became the basic point of reference for the development of transformative learning theoretical framework. The basic idea, which is prominent throughout Mezirow's work (inter alia 1981, 1991, 1994, 2000) is that people usually find themselves in a system of habits of mind through which they interpret reality, without being able to judge the true value it has for their lives. In adulthood, however, they might realize that this system is dysfunctional, as it contains distorted or incomplete assumptions. Therefore adults need support in order to critically re-evaluate their assumptions and transform them, giving vital meaning to their experiences.

Mezirow claimed (inter alia 1985, 1991, 1997) that there are four types of learning; the last two are where the transformational process occurs. The first type involves the elaboration of an existing point of view. It is a process during which we improve or change a specific assumption we have embraced, without questioning the broader system of our mental habits in which this assumption is embedded. The second type

of learning refers to adopting a new point of view, which is nevertheless compatible and consistent with those that have been already embraced. Therefore, it is a process in which we gain more information, but without transforming our way of making sense. The third type of learning constitutes a radical transformation of a point of view, while the fourth type is the transformation of one or more habits of mind. In the latter, we transform not only what we know, but also the way in which we perceive reality and learn from our experiences.

By comparing Mezirow's view to Kegan's theory, we realize that there are some differences, but also important points of convergence.

Their major difference is that, according to Kegan, transformational learning is not explicitly the province of adulthood, while Mezirow claims that transformative learning can occur only during this stage of the life span. Hence, the epistemological shifts which are identified by Mezirow as the third and fourth type of learning correspond to Kegan's model only regarding the transition from the third to the fourth order of consciousness.

On the other hand, a crucial point of convergence between the two theories is that mental transformation is about changing the *form* of the meaning-making system. Hence, transformative learning does not refer to just any kind of learning but to the sort which incites deep changes to our frame of reference and let us "*know in a different way*" (Taylor and Elias, 2012, p. 151).

Another significant commonality between the two perspectives concerns the capacities that are required from a learner in order to move from the socialized to the self-authoring mind (according to Kegan's perspective) or to transform certain points of view or habits of mind (according to Mezirow's perspective). Both theorists claim that this shift demands a specific order of mental functioning which is characterized by a capacity of abstract, critical mode of thinking. More specifically, Kegan (1994) argues that the person might create the ability to integrate her various values, beliefs, ideals, convictions and interpersonal states into a complex system of organizing experience. She might view them as parts of a whole upon which she can think critically and act. Mezirow (2000), in his turn, states that the transformational process is open-ended and includes a meaningful, holistic exploration and (re)organization of perceptions and feelings through critical reflection:

Learners may be helped to explore all aspects of a frame of reference: its genealogy, power allocation, internal logic, uses, affective and intuitive dimensions, advantages, and disadvantages [...] The learner can look at the same experience from a variety of points of view and see the concepts and feelings depend on the perspective through which they occur.

(Mezirow, 2000, p. 29)

### **Kegan's perspective meets transformation theory**

If we consider the total of the dimensions which have been stated regarding the components of Kegan's theory and the points of its convergence as well as its differentiation toward Mezirow's view, we may argue that Kegan provides a significant contribution to the development of transformation theory. He broadens the concept of transformational learning and explores the whole spectrum of radical changes which occur within the person's consciousness during the life span. Moreover, he contributes to a better understanding of the dialectical movement and the distinctions which emerge within each stage of development. Hence, his approach strengthens the understanding of the learners current meaning-forming and their

actual capacities to transform it. Thus, an adult educator becomes able to examine the fit between learners' abilities and her demands made upon them. Kegan is indeed careful at this point. He underlines (2000) that adult educators need to understand where precisely "the student is" (p. 61) and how costly the transformational project may seem to her, so that not to create designs that "get out too far ahead of the learner" (p. 66). Also, he makes another gentle differentiation from Mezirow's work, stating that although the latter's suggestion concerning the enhancement of a student's ability toward self-authority is an appropriate transformational aim, adult educators should however discern "how rapidly or gradually this shift in authority should optimally take place for that student, which is a function of how far he or she is along this particular bridge" (ibid, p.66).

### **The contribution of aesthetic experience**

The role of aesthetic experience – a notion understood as systematic exploration of a work of art – might have a significant impact in unearthing insights on a learning issue whose content is related to the meaning that could be drawn from the work of art at hand. Dewey (1934/1980), Gardner (1990), Adorno (1986), Castoriadis (2008) are among the scholars who have argued that our contact with great art may trigger a large spectrum of emotions and reflections, and create dialogue with our inner thoughts, desires, fears and hopes that are normally hidden under a decoy of conventional meanings.

Kegan himself seems to share this conception. In his major works *The Evolving Self* (1982) and *In Over our Heads* (1994) he approaches, through the exploration of poems by T.S. Eliot, Mary Stewart Hammond and Ric Masten, as well as novels by H. Hemingway and J. Joyce, the underlying ideas, intuitions and feelings that are articulated during the shift from previous to present stance of human beings' beliefs and values. Moreover, he includes in his contribution to Mezirow and Associates' volume (2000) extended references to Ibsen's *Doll's House (Nora)* in an effort to show how the heroine is reaching a new set of insights regarding her assumptions, where they came from, how and why she had been unawarely identified with them, and how she starts exercising control over them.

Furthermore, a number of important philosophers and theorists of education and art (e.g. Adorno, 1986; Eisner, 2002; Marcuse, 1978; Perkins, 1994, etc.) have revealed that it is not only the content (the meaning) of a work of art but also its morphological elements that, in correlation to it, may have an impact on triggering critical reflection. [Indicatively, elements of the morphological structure in a film are the narration, the role of music and the sound design, the camera's frame and placement, the choice of scenery, the handling of colour, the symbols, etc. Respectively, in a literary text, components of the morphological structure are the narration point of view, the time period, the space, the expressive means; in paintings, the colour, the shape, the lines; in music the rhythm, the melody, the tempo, etc.]. In another paper (Kokkos, 2013) I have claimed that the interplay between the content and the morphological structure of an important work of art offers the learners an opportunity to obtain a holistic approach toward it, and come to its thorough comprehension.

For those reasons, I take Wim Wenders's film *Alice in the Cities* (1974) as a case study, and I will explore its spiritual content in relation to its structure, in order to expand the treatment of some crucial issues of Kegan's theoretical framework, such as: How a person's consciousness is developed? Which is the evidence? Is it a linear or spiral process? Are there signs that while a person is situated in a certain order of consciousness he or she has the potential to move toward a next one? Which are the

challenges and the obstacles?

The significant works of art have a multidimensional texture and are open to a variety of interpretations. Hence, I believe my ideas on the film, which will be presented in the following session, contain only a part of the possible “readings” and function mostly as open questions.

**A case study: *Alice in the Cities***

*First part.* In the first scene of the film there is an airplane, like a dot, flying very high, in a hazy horizon, symbolizing possibly a psychic journey toward the unknown. After that the camera captures Philip by the sea, sitting under a dock (symbol of a “shelter”?). He is a German intellectual, a journalist touring the U.S.A. on an assignment from his magazine to write a representation of America. In his “shelter”, he is happily mumbling a rock song which reveals his cultural references. His appearance and his clothes show that he is a relaxed wanderer in the style of the “left intellectuals/easy riders” of the 70’s. Furthermore, we will soon realize that he is pointedly critical of the commercial culture which is, as he states – and as the film shows –infiltrated in the whole American “scene”. He takes photographs consecutively, in an attempt to portray this scene, but, as he explains, they “never show what you've really seen.” Thus, Philip is incapable to capture the American reality, and simultaneously he is paralyzed by his writing assignment. He hasn’t even begun writing his paper, while he has already reached the deadline set by his agency.

In the first part of the film, Philip pointlessly drifts through American cities. Almost all the scenes are nocturnal; the lighting is obscure, often hazy, betraying his psychic stagnation and dissolution. The city sounds – car horns, trains and trucks passing by – are very intense, inciting unawaringly a feeling of anxiety and continuous movement. The scenes begin and end in slow rhythm (‘fade in’, ‘fade out’), suggesting wandering as well. In the background, a musical pattern played by an electric guitar is repeated monotonously from time to time, reproducing the feeling of being trapped.

One night, Philip stays at a small hotel room. From the window one can see enormous advertisements with the words “SKYWAY”, “FREE” (an ironic comment on the “American Dream” perhaps). Inside the room, in a dominating position in the centre, is a television set. Philip falls asleep watching TV-series and in the morning, when the film he is watching is continuously interrupted by commercials, like an “angry adolescent” he smashes the television set to the floor.

At some point, Philip reaches New York and visits his (ex?) girlfriend. He begins to tell her his impressions from his trip. When she attempts to tell him something, he doesn’t listen, he continues speaking. He starts taking his clothes off to make love to her. She refuses, explaining to him that she cannot relate to a person who is so self-centred.

Here the first part of the film ends. In Kegan's terms (1986), Philip, regarding the ‘logical-cognitive’ domain of his order of consciousness, can reason deductively – critically, and he is also subordinated to the norms of a certain ideology. These are characteristics of the 3<sup>rd</sup> order. However, in the ‘interpersonal-affective’ and the ‘social-cognitive’ domain, he is mostly in the 2<sup>nd</sup> order: He is not aware of shared feelings; he constructs himself only in terms of his own point of view, without being interested to maintain mutual relationships.

*Second part.* Philip is at the airport, ready to fly back to Europe. A young mother asks him to watch her 10 year old daughter Alice for a little while, and then she disappears. Philip will have to handle this situation. He knows nothing about Alice, apart from the fact that she has a ticket for Amsterdam on the same flight he does, and that, as she

tells him, her grandmother lives in Wuppertal, but she doesn't know the address. Philip decides to take up on the adventure and travel with her. As a matter of fact, during the next days, he spends his last money with Alice in search of her grandmother's house.

In Kegan's terms, Philip in the child's company moves toward the 3<sup>rd</sup> order of consciousness concerning all of its domains: He meets the demands of another person. The norms of his "progressive" ideology take primacy over himself so that he takes on responsibilities which are related to his conception about the social bonds of the commonwealth. So, he takes care of the abandoned child, avoiding handing her over to the police.

This evolution in Philip's perception, apart from the narration, is evident in the film from a number of morphological elements. Now, the montage doesn't fade in and fade out; the plot evolves faster; the scenes are brighter; the sounds are less "annoying"; the advertisements on the streets are scarce and television disappears. The European cities are friendlier. Alice expresses this feeling: "I find Amsterdam much prettier than New York"... Only the musical background remains unchanged, implying that there are some sides of Philip's 'immunity' that prevent the completion of his transition to the 3<sup>rd</sup> order.

Indeed, Philip's shift does not occur without internal resistances and regressions. He often seems to be subordinated to a romanticized duty of protection rather than construct willingly an essential interpersonal relationship. Sometimes his new role tires him, he doesn't feel comfortable and there seems to be a mismatch between his free ridership and the way in which he now experiences his present order of consciousness. For instance, he says to Alice: "Because of you I'm running around in circles", and "Do you think I'm crazy about driving little girls around?" However, these reactions of his emerge among others which reveal his new capacity for empathy and his disposition to construct a relationship with her. A typical example which shows that he experiences both orders at the same time is when Alice asks him to tell her a bed time story. "I don't know any stories" is his first blunt reaction. When he sees her disappointment, he changes and begins to tell her a story he improvises that moment with increasing feeling to it.

Their relationship however does go through a serious turmoil, when it is proven impossible to find the grandmother and Alice admits she had given him false information. Then Philip decides to hand the girl over to the police and return to his free ridership behavior, showing his retreat to an order of consciousness where he tends to behave on behalf of his own goals.

After that, he returns to his "roots" – to a rock concert where he seems satisfied. During the concert though it is worth noticing one detail: Next to Philip there is a girl Alice's age, which he looks at with sympathy. It is as Wenders poses the question "What could he be thinking...".

*Third part.* After the concert, Philip returns to the hotel. Alice is waiting for him there, after escaping from the police. Philip welcomes her, almost relieved, and they begin searching again for the grandmother. Gradually, it is more and more obvious that the whole experience he had with Alice has brought him to the edge of moving toward a next order of consciousness. First he moved away from the relationship with her, then looked at it and decided to reframe it in more complex and functional way. He is now able to replace his idealized approach to take care of her with a new conception of love and closeness. He decides self-consciously to maintain bounds to her and he is authentically committed to this relationship. He seems to be regulating his conflicting values and desires between the free ridership and the task to take care of Alice. In



Kegan's terms, he makes a generalization across these values and subordinates them under a larger perspective that he creates. He does not simply adjust his thinking regarding his contact with Alice. He goes through a qualitative inner shift so that his relationship with her derives from a deeper, integral set of convictions. Now it seems as if he enjoys her company. He shares his thoughts with her. He carefully pays attention to her needs, he cares if she is tired, if she is hungry, and he responds in a functional way. She in return reciprocates, e.g. "When do you want me to wake you up?" They find ways to co-exist and have fun: they bathe in the river; they exercise; Philip – who does not give up on some of his habits – has a fleeting love affair with a woman, but that does not disturb his relationship with Alice who sleeps peacefully in the room next door. The degree of closeness increases. Each one brings the other's point of view into the process of constructing his/her point of view. Symbolically, Alice takes his photograph, and when they look at the printed photo together her face reflects on the imprinting of his.

At some point, Alice's mother is found in Munich and Alice prepares to go by train to meet her. Philip says goodbye to Alice at the station and he is sad because he doesn't have money to travel with her. Then Alice gives him a – very precious to her – 100 dollar bill. In the train, during their new journey, she asks him what his future plans were. "To finish this story" is his open-ended answer. In the last scene, the two of them embrace and look at the landscape from the open window of the train as it runs through the country side. Symbolisms are dominant: The route, unlike the airplane of the first scene, is specific and "down to earth". The train runs next to a river, which marks the flow that cannot turn back. Finally, the camera rises and records an increasingly broader view of the world. We see the river unreeling to the end of the horizon and, for the first time, the melody of the original musical pattern is enriched, becomes more integrated and is performed by a variety of musical instruments.

### **Discussion**

Through the exploration of Wenders's film we may revisit Kegan's theory and draw some insights. A first one is that the development of human beings' consciousness seems to be an extremely complex and dialectical process. During each transformational transition, elements of two orders of consciousness may co-exist. Indeed, it is likely that the 'logical-cognitive' domain of a certain order of consciousness co-exists with the 'socio-cognitive' or 'intrapersonal-affective' domain of the next one and vice versa. Furthermore, the developmental process is not linear. It is quite likely for a person who remains for a long period of time in a certain order of consciousness, to regress to the previous order several times, until stabilizing in the first. Another insight is that it seems that within each stage of development the person experiences a large range of dilemmas, challenges, regressions and urges. Hence, it becomes important, from the point of view of adult educators, that we may be extremely attentive regarding where exactly our learners are situated on the "bridge"; which are their abilities to move on; which mixture of challenge and support may we offer them and which the impact of the surrounding environment might be.

As for the use of Wenders's film as a case study, my intention was to show the potential of aesthetic experience regarding a more thorough understanding of Kegan's theory. Furthermore, through the approach of the hero's mental evolution, I have attempted to show the value of aesthetic experience concerning the exploration of sides of the human existence, such as interpersonal relationships and moral dilemmas. Within the literature of emancipatory learning, humans often attempt to be conceived through the exploration of authentic life stories. This method has undoubtedly a

significant strong point, given that it is based on the concrete experience and on the reflection upon it. Nevertheless, the navigation in human narrations that are included in significant works of literature, theatre, poetry or cinema may offer an alternative way of making sense of the processes of mental development, as they are expressed within the field of partnering, parenting, intercultural relationships, learning, working life, social life, citizenship and so on. For these reasons, I claim that the aesthetic experience, in concert to Kegan's theoretical framework, may lead to a further understanding of the individual and social reality.

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## The influence of the critical approach on the development of adult education in Greece

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### Introduction

We believe that the two principal currents of thought and action in the field of adult education which developed within the framework of the critical approach are:

- a. The theory and practice of Paulo Freire which developed mainly in the countries of Latin America. Freire's basic idea is that 'The educational process is a process of problem – posing the contradictions of the oppressed's situation for reflection and action (Brookfield & Holst, 2011, p. 176). The perspective that Freire supports is that adult education contributes to the transformation of the social structure (Freire, 1972, p. 47), encouraging learners to participate in dialogue and to problematize reality (Jarvis, 1995, p. 150). Freire's approach is the social-emancipatory view of transformative learning (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 130).
- b. The theory and practice of transformative learning which developed mainly in North America (Kreber, 2012). According to Mezirow, who is considered to be its founder, 'Transformative learning has both individual and social dimensions and implications' (2000, p. 8). Nevertheless Mezirow's theory is characterized as a psycho-critical approach (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 132). Cranton points out that discourse is central to transformative learning and explains that Mezirow defines discourse as dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings and values (2006, p. 24).

Both of these approaches have one of their starting points in critical theory, as it was developed by the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Habermas) and they place emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking.

In Greece, the more important institution of adult education in the 1980s was the General Secretariat of Popular Education (GSPE). At the same time, and in close co-operation with the GSPE, the Studies and Self-Education Center (SaSEC) which published the journal "Self-Education", was in operation.

Twenty years later, in the decade of 2000, studies in adult education, mainly within the framework of the Hellenic Open University (HOU) were developed. At the same time, the Hellenic Adult Education Association was created by professors and tutors from the HOU, by members of the sectors active in this field, and adult educators. The Hellenic Adult Education Association (HAEA) publishes the journal "Adult Education", which is the only scientific journal in this field in Greece.

Our paper is concerned with the contribution of the critical approach to the development of adult education in Greece.

More specifically, we will examine articles from the journals: Self-education (Aftomorfosi) and Adult Education (Ekpedefsi Enilikon) in order to investigate the

influence of the critical approach on adult education as it is depicted in the two basic journals published in Greece in this field, in two different time periods.

### **1. The historical and institutional context**

After the election victory of the socialists in 1981, the following year the non-governmental institution Studies and Self-Education Center (SaSEC) was established. The SaSEC had the following aims (Vergidis, 1991):

- To participate in people's education, particularly for lower social classes, with modern pedagogical methods.
- To develop the creative potential of its participants and their active participation in all levels of social activity.
- To study and analyze social issues.
- To eliminate monologue and the authoritarian methods in adult education, and to promote self-education

In 1983 the General Secretariat of Popular Education (GSPE) was established and general education for adults was developed with the support of SaSEC (Karalis, 2010).

We should point out that the rapid quantitative increase in adult education activities in the 1980s, which was due to funding from the European Social Fund, created a need for more educators (Karalis & Vergidis, 2006). As a result, 'The lack of educators with appropriate skills created the need to organize suitable training programmes'. (Vergidis, 1992).

The SaSEC 'financed by the GSPE, undertook the responsibility to supply the institution of popular education with ideas, theoretical support, texts and materials...The members of the center more inspired by the ideas of the School of Frankfurt but mainly by Freire's ideas...' (Kokkos, 2012). It should be highlighted that the paradigm of self education in the 1980s underwent an important development and it is claimed that it is equally close to the notion of transformative learning (Beille, 2011). In addition, Vergidis maintains (2011) that self-education constituted an early naming of lifelong learning

One of the SaSEC's activities during its period of operation (1982-1987) was the publication of the journal *Self-education*, along with the organization of international conferences and the publication of books and educational material (Kokkos, 2010; Karalis, 2010).

We believe that the texts that were published in the journal *Self-education* express the dynamics of the five year period 1982-1986, during which the development of critical theory was attempted for the first time in Greece, within the context of adult education (Karalis, 2010; Kokkos, 2012).

In 1987 education priorities and policies changed. Huge emphasis was placed on professional training and a significant turn to the private sector was noted (Karalis & Vergidis, 2004). The SaSEC discontinued its operation and the educational activities of the GSPE dwindled. Quite a few of its most active and highly educated staff members became professors at various Universities around the country.

According to Kokkos (2010, 2012), the situation in the field of adult education began to change again in 2003. Adult Education Centers and Schools for Parents were in operation throughout the country and the institution of the Second Chance Schools was developed. Post graduate courses in the field of adult education started operating at the Hellenic Open University as well as at other Greek universities. In 2004 the Hellenic Adult Education Association (HAEA), which publishes the peer-reviewed

Greek journal *Adult Education* (thirty-one volumes until today), was founded.

As Karalis (2010) has pointed out, the establishment of the HAEA contributed to the development of ties between the academic world and professionals in the field, as well as to their familiarization with the basic theoretical currents in adult education and with the most well-known theoreticians in this scientific field.

In Greece, the journal *Adult Education* constitutes the only scientific journal in the field of adult education and we believe that it portrays, to a great extent, the theoretical inquiries and questioning of the greek scientific community, as well as the research work in this field, which can influence the practice of professionals working as members of staff in adult education institutions or as adult educators.

## **2. Objective and method**

Kokkos (2012) maintains that ‘the only theoretical tradition of adult education that ever existed in Greece, arose in 1980s, derived from Freire’s idea of conscientization and the critical theory of the School of Frankfurt...after almost fifteen years...Mezirow’s ideas...were welcomed with enthusiasm by Greek adult educators...’

As we mentioned above, in Greece, the journals which express theoretical inquiry and research in the field of adult education are, in the 1980s, the journal *Self-education* and later, in 2004, the journal *Adult Education*.

The objective of our research is to investigate which area of adult education the texts published in those two journals belong to, and to what extent those texts refer to the critical approach in the field of adult education.

The sample of issues we will examine is the total number of issues of *Self-education* which were published between 1982 and 1985, when publication of the journal stopped, and 30 issues of *Adult-Education*, from the first to the thirtieth, which were published from 2004 until 2013 (three annually).

The two journals’ published texts were grouped according to their content by thematic areas and categories, which were constructed by Karalis (2008) based on the international bibliography. In addition, this grouping rests on the view of adult education as a social system, which is analyzed on a micro-, mid and macro- level (Mouzelis, 1991), together with the epistemological and theoretical foundations of the field. This choice was made as, on the one hand it concerns thematic areas which emerged from a review of the international bibliography (Karalis, 2008), and on the other because we can move on to make comparisons between the content of the texts which were published in the period 2001-2005 (*ibid*) in international journals and the content of the texts which were published in the journal *Adult Education* in the period 2004-2013. We believe that although the two periods are consecutive and don’t coincide, strong indications may still emerge from the comparison. Each text was included in one thematic area only, and in one category.

We should make clear that from the journal *Self-education*, which wasn’t strictly scientific, all the texts that were published were examined (apart from brief comments and small informative texts), in total 41 texts from the six issues that were published. From the journal *Adult Education* the papers published in the section *Articles – Studies – Research* were examined, as well as the texts that were included in *Special issues*, with the exception of interviews, book presentations and publications without a bibliography. In total 111 texts were included in the sample.

We also examined the gender as well as the status of the authors, as the authors themselves refer to it. Quantitative content analysis was used to categorize the texts and qualitative analysis to identify the papers which belonged to the critical approach.

### 3. Findings and discussion

From table 1 it emerges that the texts in the journal Self-education concerned for the most part the macro-level of adult education (17 texts, 41% of the total), which contains five categories. It appears that emphasis is placed on the social, economic and cultural dimensions of adult education (6 publications).

In the thematic area of the foundation of the field of adult education, 10 texts were listed (24.4% of the total) of which 5 were on the epistemological framework of the field.

In the thematic areas mid-level and micro-level, 7 publications were listed in each (of which 6 were on the evaluation and 5 on group dynamics).

From the qualitative content analysis of the publications, it appears that the writers have been influenced more by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School rather than by Freire's theory. In any case, the writer with the most texts is Anagnostou (3 texts), who had studied in the School of Frankfurt and whose objective was for the SaSEC to become a cradle for the formation of critical thinking following in the footsteps of Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas (Kokkos 2010). Anagnostou's texts belong in the domain of the epistemological framework of the field.

**Table 1: Texts by thematic area and category (journal Self-Education)**

	Thematic areas and categories of texts	Number of texts	%
1	<b>FOUNDATIONS OF THE FIELD</b>	10	24.4
1.a	Epistemological framework	5	12.2
1.b	Relationship between informal and formal education	1	2.4
1.c	Education and learning as continuous	2	4.9
1.d	Theories of learning	2	4.9
2	<b>MACRO-LEVEL</b>	17	41.4
2.a	Social, Economic and cultural dimensions of adult education	6	14.6
2.b	Analysis of institutions and policies	6	14.6
2.c	Historical factors	-	-
2.d	Characteristics of adult learners	3	7.3
2.e	Social gender	2	4.9
3	<b>MID-LEVEL</b>	7	17.1
3.a	Investigation of educational needs	1	2.4
3.b	Participation of learners	-	-
3.c	Course design	-	-
3.d	Evaluation	6	14.6
4	<b>MICRO-LEVEL</b>	7	17.1
4.a	Teaching methods and techniques	2	4.9
4.b	Group dynamics	5	12.2
	Total	41	100

We should point out (see table 2) that most of the writers (12 individuals) were members of the SaSEC and 9 texts were signed by SaSEC without the name of the writer being mentioned. Among the writers there were also employees from county council boards of popular education (7 individuals) and employees of GSPE. In addition, 6 of the writers were specialists from other countries. It is obvious that in Self-education approximately half of the writers were members of the SaSEC and almost 30% employees in the central and regional structures of popular education. There does not appear to have been any connection with the country's universities nor

is a connection with other educational institutions, at least as far as the status of the writers concerned.

**Table 2: Status of authors and number of texts whose authorship they have contributed to (journal Self-education)**

	Status of author	Number of authors	%
1	Members of the SaSEC	12	27.3
2	SaSEC	9	20.5
3	Employees in the General Secretariat of Popular Education	6	13.6
4	Employees in the County Council Boards for Popular Education	7	15.9
5	Foreign authors	6	13.6
6	Other	4	9.1
	Total*	44	100
	*Some texts have more than one author		

Popular education appears to have been a matter for members of the SaSEC and for some of the popular education employees' office at central and county level. Documentation of the field was attempted based on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School; however emphasis was placed for the most part on the macro-level and in particular on the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of adult education and on the analysis of institutions and policies.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to highlight the emphasis placed on evaluation (6 texts) and on group dynamics (5 texts). Taking into consideration school practices educational that was applied to popular education until 1981 (Demunter P., Varnava-Skoura G. & Vergidis D., 1984, pp. 48-50) it is clear that a reversal was attempted, a break with the past, as well as a systematic effort, on the one hand, for the theoretical foundation of the field of adult education and the practices in learning groups, and, on the other, for the evaluation of teaching activities. Nevertheless, we should note that no text on empirical research was published in Self-education. In any case, until the 1980s, educational research was very limited in Greece and almost non-existent in the field of adult education (Vergidis, 1997).

According to the data in tables 3 and 4, the number of female authors in the journal Self-education was limited. Only two out of ten authors were women.

**Table 3: Authors\* by gender journal Self-education)**

	Gender	Number of authors	%
1	Men	22	78.6
2	Women	6	21.4
	Total	28	100
	*Each author is listed only once, even if he/she has contributed to the authorship of more than a text		



**Table 4: Participation\* of male and female authors in the total number of texts (journal Self-education)**

	Gender	Number of texts	%
1	Men	29	82.9
2	Women	6	17.1
	Total	35	100
	*Each author is listed as many times as he/she has contributed to the writing of a text.		

From table 5 it emerges that in the journal Adult Education, emphasis moves from the thematic area macro-level (26 papers: 23.4% of the total) to the thematic area foundation of the field (43 papers: 38.7% of the total).

In addition, the proportion of papers on the mid-level and micro-level increases (20.7% and 17.1% respectively), in comparison with the texts in the journal Self-education.

Most of the texts are included in the categories:

- Epistemological formation (18 papers)
- Theories of learning (14 papers)
- Teaching methods and techniques (14 papers)
- Analysis of institutions and policies (11 papers)

What is clear is the effort and the interest in epistemological and theoretical foundations of the field of adult education, something that is strengthened by the Special Issues of the journal Adult Education and by the international conferences organized by the HAEA. Analysis of institutions and policies reaches just 10% of the total.

**Table 5: Texts by thematic area and category (journal Adult Education)**

	Thematic areas and categories of texts	Number of texts	%
1	<b>FOUNDATIONS OF FIELD</b>	43	38.7
1.a	Epistemological framework	18	16.2
1.b	Relationship between informal and formal teaching	5	4.5
1.c	Teaching and learning as continuous	6	5.4
1.d	Theories of learning	14	12.6
2	<b>MACRO-LEVEL</b>	26	23.4
2.a	Social, Economic and cultural dimensions of adult education	6	5.4
2.b	Analysis of institutions and policies	11	9.9
2.c	Historical factors	3	2.7
2.d	Characteristics of adult learners	5	4.5
2.e	Social gender	1	0.9

3	<b>MID-LEVEL</b>	23	20.7
3.a	Investigation of learning needs	2	1.8
3.b	Learner participation	5	4.5
3.c	Course design	6	5.4
3.d	Evaluation	10	9
4	<b>MICRO-LEVEL</b>	19	17.1
4.a	Teaching methods and techniques	14	12.6
4.b	Group dynamics	5	4.5
	Total	111	100

Comparing this data with Karalis' findings (2008) for the period 2001-2005 (see table 6) – if we acknowledge that international trends don't change significantly over the following years, in other words in the period 2005-2013 – we discover that there is strong indications of significant differences between the interests of the international scientific community and the greek in the field of adult education. The international scientific community seems to be mainly interested in the thematic area: macro-level and in particular the category: analysis of institutions and policies. The greek scientific community seems to be mainly interested in the thematic area: foundations of field and in particular in the epistemological framework and in theories of learning. In addition it appears that in Greece there is greater interest in adult education at mid and micro-level and in particular in teaching methods and techniques and evaluation.

**Table 6: Texts published in international journals by thematic area and subject matter category (2001-2005)**

	Thematic areas and subject matter	Number of references	%
1	Foundations of field	204	36.5
1.a	Epistemological framework	76	13.6
1.b	Relationship between informal and formal education	26	4.7
1.c	Teaching and learning as continuous	47	8.4
1.d	Theories of learning	55	9.8
2	<b>MACRO-LEVEL</b>	260	46.5
2.a	Social, Economic and cultural dimensions of adult education	82	14.7
2.b	Analysis of institutions and policies	119	21.3
2.c	Historical factors	13	2.3
2.d	Characteristics of adult learners	13	2.3
2.e	Social gender	33	5.9
3	<b>MID-LEVEL</b>	62	11.1
3.a	Investigation of teaching needs	9	1.6
3.b	Learner participation	30	5.4
3.c	Course design	20	3.6
3.d	Evaluation	3	0.5

4	<b>MICRO-LEVEL</b>	33	6.3
4.a	Teaching methods and techniques	28	5.4
4.b	Group dynamics	5	0.9
	Total	559	100
	Source: Karalis, 2008		

We stress that 7 out of the 18 texts which contribute to the epistemological framework of the field of adult education make mention of the critical approach (see table 5). In addition, 10 out of the 14 texts which refer to theories of learning make direct mention of the critical approach. In total, 4 out of 10 texts in the thematic area: Foundations of field, concern the critical approach. It would appear that the journal *Adult Education* constitutes a forum for discussion and dialogue on the critical approach.

We should add that almost 1 in 4 of the sample texts is a text of empirical research. It is clear that the scientific community in the field of adult education in Greece has broadened and produces on the one hand research, and on the other theoretical texts with emphasis on the critical approach. In addition, a part of the texts refer specifically to the practices of adult educators (15.3% of the total), which in any case constitutes a huge target group of HAEA.

From table 7 we find out that quite a few of the authors of texts in the journal *Adult Education* are professors in tertiary education (14.7% of the total) of whom some are either professors at the Hellenic Open University (HOU) or are its associates, working as tutors at the HOU.

The authors that are tutors at the HOU, without being professors in tertiary education, are 15.5% of the total. The percentage of foreign authors (20.7%) is significant, as is the percentage of authors who are members of staff in educational institutions (13.8%). Some of the authors are teachers, postgraduate students and PhD candidates and adult educators.

From the evidence above the strong contribution of the scientific academic staff of the HOU to the development of the field of adult education emerges, as does its co-operation with the greek and international scientific and academic community, the active participation of members of various adult education institutions as well as educators in the development of the field.

**Table 7: Number of authors (journal *Adult Education*)**

	Author's status	Number of authors	%
1	University professors (Of whom from HOU)	17 (5)	14.7 (4.3)
2	Tutors at HOU	18	15.5
3	Adult educators	7	6
4	Teachers	15	12.9
5	Members of staff in educational institutions	16	13.8
6	Postgraduate students and PhD candidates	10	8.6
7	Researchers	3	2.6
8	Foreign authors	24	20.7
9	Other	6	5.2
	Total*	116	100
	*Some texts have more than one author		

**Table 8: Authors' status and number of texts the writing of which they have**

**contributed to (journal Adult Education)**

	Author's status	Number of texts	%
1	University Professors (Of whom from HOU)	29 (16)	20.2 (11.2)
2	Tutors at HOU	26	18.2
3	Adult educators	7	4.9
4	Teachers	16	11.2
5	Members of staff in educational institutions	23	16.1
6	Postgraduate students and PhD candidates	11	7.7
7	Researchers	3	2.1
8	Foreign authors	24	16.8
9	Other	4	2.8
	Total*	143	100
	*Each author is listed as many times as he/she has contributed to the writing of a text.		

From Tables 7 and 8 it emerges that university professors, HOU tutors and members of staff at educational institutions publish more frequently and, consequently, are more active contributors to the journal Adult Education.

As we can see in Table 9 the authors of the texts in the sample from the journal Adult Education are 51.7% men and 48.3% women.

**Table 9: Authors\* by gender (journal Adult Education)**

	Gender	Number of authors	%
1	Men	60	51.7
2	Women	56	48.3
	Total	116	100
	*Each author is listed once, even if he/she has contributed to the writing of more than one text		

It is clear that in comparison with the 80s, the number of women who study adult education issues and publish related texts has increased very much and approaches the number of men.

However, equality between men and women in the field of adult education is tempered if we take into consideration (table 10) the number of texts written by male authors (57.3%) and the number of texts written by female authors (42.7%). It would appear that male authors publish more often than female authors.

Despite that, the strong presence of women in the development of research in the field of adult education is evident.

**Table 10: Participation\* of male and female authors in the total number of texts (journal Adult Education)**

	Gender	Number of texts	%
1	Men	82	57.3
2	Women	61	42.7
	Total	143	100

*Each author is listed as many times as he/she has contributed to the writing of a text		
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We should note that in the field of adult education a significant number of women are active, nevertheless men constitute the majority of adult educators on a national level (Kokkos, 2008, p. 20).

#### 4. Final observations

We attempted to refer to the influence of the critical approach on the field of adult education in Greece, in two time periods:

A: The beginning of the 1980s and in particular the period 1982-1985, as is depicted in the texts which were published in the journal *Self-education* and

B: The decade 2004-2013 as is depicted in the texts which were published in the 30 first issues of the journal *Adult Education*.

From the data we cite, the following emerge:

- a) In the 1980s an attempt at a reversal and a break with the past was made as far as popular education is concerned. Emphasis was placed on the evaluation of educational activities and on the analysis of the intervention potential of adult education
- b) The SaSEC and the journal *Self-education* supported the attempt at improving and re-orientation of the adult education service.

The theoretical framework of the SaSEC's activities was inspired mostly by the Frankfurt School. However, emphasis was placed on the macro-level and in particular on the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of adult education and on the analysis of institutions and policies. Nevertheless, none of the texts had emerged from empirical research in the field of adult education.

- c) The authors of the majority of texts were members of the SaSEC and employees at the GSPE and the regional services of adult education. In addition, the vast majority of writers were men.
- d) From the journal *Adult Education* it would appear that an attempt is made at another break and reversal. Emphasis is focused on the area of the foundations of the field, (mainly in the categories: epistemological framework and theories of learning) and on the micro-level (mainly in the category: teaching methods and techniques). There would also appear to be differences between the interests of the international and the greek scientific community. The international scientific community places emphasis on the analysis of institutions and policies, while the greek scientific community places emphasis on the foundations of the field and teaching methods and techniques.
- e) A significant number of the authors of the texts in the journal *Adult Education* are university professors and tutors at the HOU. The scientific academic staff of the HOU contributes decisively to the development of the field of adult education, while the presence of foreign specialists – mainly university level – among the authors of the journal *Adult Education*, is marked
- f) A large number of the texts in the thematic area: Foundation of field, concern the critical approach in adult education. The journal *Adult Education* constitutes, then, a forum for dialogue on the critical approach. In addition, 1

in 4 texts in the sample is empirical research and a number of the texts in the sample concern adult educators.

As appears from the above, at the level of scientific discussion, the contribution of the critical approach is very important in Greece.

Obviously, study of the educational work within learning groups is needed in order to find out how far the critical approach has influenced the work of the educational services and educators.

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**TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND NEW TECHNOLOGY**



**The Usage of Tabletop RPG as an Educational Method in Language Teaching in Adults**  
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**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to provide the theoretical background for an interdisciplinary language teaching method for adults using tabletop Role Playing Games.

**Introduction**

Over the last few decades, Adult Education is considered as one of the most significant disciplines of the educational field.

Adult education is a field of activities that appeared in Europe and the USA in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its target was the improvement of the educational level of the socially vulnerable classes but it rapidly spread to other forms such as educational training and education in matters regarding culture, society and politics. (Kokkos, 2005)

Adult learners have some certain characteristics that make them unique and rather distinct from underage learners. They are developed characters and they have completed personalities with experiences and knowledge not found in their underage counterparts. Teaching adult learners is a greater challenge than under aged ones since it is extremely difficult to find a methodology that covers all their needs and desires in the educational environment.

It is in this context that I suggest a different approach in teaching to adults; an approach that will attempt to cover most of their needs and desires in a cognitive, mental and ethical level.

Firstly, I will coarsely mention the focal points of both theories that I rely on and I will provide the definition and the mechanisms of the game. Secondly, I will indicate how they can be applied to the educational process especially to the language teaching through Tabletop Role Playing Games.

**Focal Points of Experiential Learning and Transformative Learning Theory**

*Experiential Learning Theory (ELT)*

The main point of Experiential Learning Theory is that learners acquire knowledge through experience. D.A. Kolb, one of the most notable representatives of it, based his work on three prominent approaches, those of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget. The theory aims at the integration of the mental and emotional process and therefore places emphasis on the role that experience plays in the learning process. In doing so, it pursues the intellectual and emotional stimulation of the learner.

D.A. Kolb defines the meaning of learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (1984, p.38). Taking into account that learning is an ongoing and active process, it can be applied predominantly in everyday life. The experience that people gain in a daily basis can change depending on the interaction that they have with the environment.

ELT's viewpoint on the learning process combines experience, perception, cognition and behavior, pointing to a holistic learning experience. The theory operates on two

axes: a four stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles.

The first axis is a four stage cycle:

1. Concrete Experience
2. Reflective Observation
3. Abstract Conceptualization
4. Active Experimentation

The second axis is a group of learning styles comprised of:

1. Diverging (feeling and watching)
2. Assimilating (watching and thinking )
3. Converging (doing and thinking)
4. Accommodating (doing and feeling)

Undeniably, in a classroom every educator will encounter learners with these learning styles and it would be ideal if there was an approach that could enclose and satisfy all of them. David A. Kolb claims that “When learning is conceived as a holistic adaptive process, it provides conceptual bridges across life situations such as school and work portraying learning as continuous, lifelong process”. To understand what learning is, we must first sense the nature and the forms of human knowledge as well as the processes whereby this knowledge is created. He conjectures that “Knowledge is the result of the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge”.

From an early age, we learn things and we acquire knowledge from the environment and everything that surround us. We never stop learning and everything that constitutes a personal acquired experience can be transformed into knowledge. In this context, it is important to note that experiential learning is not a molecular educational concept but rather is a molar concept describing the central process of human adaptation to the social and physical environment (D.A.Kolb, 2002, p.31)

These are the main points of ELT that I rely on, which emphasize on learning through experience. Now, I will refer to the second theory concerning the transformation of experience in adult education.

#### *Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)*

Jack Mezirow, the chief representative of the Transformative Learning theory, has arguably developed the most predominant and integrated theory regarding adult education. As a leading thinker he provides a different perspective of conceiving knowledge and experience. The main axis of this theory is the transformation of experience and the already acquired knowledge of the learner.

Knowledge, as it is described in the theory, is a never-ending effort to negotiate contested meanings. Moreover, TLT discusses learning in depth as a means of developing autonomous and critical thinking. Adults have higher awareness and a better understanding of their experiences and their knowledge but the majority of them are facing difficulties when attempting to realize how they gain them. It is important for adults to learn to think for themselves. They should not adhere to blindly, mindless or unquestioning acceptance of what they know through their life experiences. More specifically they should challenge the ideas, concepts and ideals that are involved in their culture, religion and personalities and they should aim at a

more active engagement and questioning of how they came to this knowledge.

As J. Mezirow states “The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depend on the context -biographical, historical, cultural- in which they are embedded” (2000, p.3). The challenge of the TLT lies in aiding adults to obtain a clearer monitoring of their lives and turn them into socially responsible and critical thinkers.

The theory points out two main types of learning: the instrumental and the communicative learning. The first one is based on learning through task-oriented, problem-solving and the determination of the cause and effect relationships. The second one focuses on how individuals communicate their feelings, needs and desires. Jack Mezirow describes the theory as “constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is central to making meaning and hence learning” (Mezirow, 1991).

According to a research that J. Mezirow conducted, it was concluded that his perspective of the learning process to adults concerns the transformation of experience and knowledge. This transformation oftentimes follows at least some of these ten ordered phases:

- Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
- Undergoing self-examination
- Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations
- Relating discontent to the similar experiences of others---recognizing that the problem is shared
- Exploring options for new ways of acting
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- Planning a course of action
- Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action
- Trying out new roles and assessing them
- Reintegrating into society with the other perspective

(As listed by Cranton, P., 2006, p. 20)

It is paramount for the learners to understand how they have gained and how they can order their experiences and their knowledge. This is the truth that the transformational learning theory deals with. Additionally, Mezirow suggests that the transformations that the adults face during and after the educational process come about due to one of four ways:

1. Elaborating Existing Frames of Reference
2. Learning New Frames of Reference
3. Transforming Points of View
4. Transforming Habits of the Mind

Transformation is a process through which adults can reformulate any existing experience, cognition, behavior and attitudes. Moreover, they can elaborate, learn to adapt new ideas and use critical thinking within certain phases during the educational process.

Even if these theories have differences, they both focus on a different perspective in the educational procedure, prefixing the experience, its transformation and the critical thinking as some of their most predominant principals. The aforementioned points of both theories are the ones that I consider focal, in order to serve the purpose of my proposed idea for a holistic educational method.

Now, that the theories have been presented, I am going to define Role Playing Games and their mechanisms. Thus, I will provide a clearer understanding of them in order to integrate the focal points of the two theories into the educational process with the use of Role Playing games.

## **Role Playing Games**

### *What is a Role Playing Game?*

“Role-Playing-Game is getting together with some friends to write a story. It's joining around a campfire or dining room to spin some tall tales. It is being creative and having fun with friends.”(Jerry Stratton, 2009) Role Playing Games are worldwide known fantasy games based on a certain set of rules and guidelines as the engaged players assume the roles of characters that have already been placed spatiotemporally in a fictional setting. The players are responsible for acting out these roles within a narrative acting, through a process of structured decision-making and character development. The actions may succeed or fail depending on the system of rules, the dice and the description of the actions. There are three main different forms of RPGs: Tabletop RPGs/pen and paper, LARP (Live Action Role Playing) and electronic media RPGs (MMORPGS, text-based MUDs and offline video games).

### *A Brief History of RPGs*

The precursor of RPGs is alleged to be the improvised theatre. In 16<sup>th</sup> century, in Europe travelling groups of actors were performing a type of improvisational theatre known as the Commedia dell'arte. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> several board games included some elements of role -playing. Viola Spolin, an innovator of the American theatre created a series of acting exercises and she established the “Theatre Games” carrying forward the concept of using theatrical games in the classroom. In the 1920's some assassin-style games were played in New York by adults and in the 1960's some groups made a step towards making creative history games.

The first official role-playing game is called Dungeon and Dragons (D&D). It was created and published in 1974 by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson. Based on war games and on J.R.R. Tolkien's published fantasy book “The Hobbit”, D&D is one of the most popular fantasy games around the world. It is set in a fantasy world where there is a variety of classes and races that you can choose to embody, such as elves, dwarfs, dragons, trolls among others. It has its own cosmology and it describes in detail all the aspects of the world. Hundreds of books have been published in order to help the conduct of the game and enhance its experience .Through the passing of time several other fantasy games appeared. Today, numerous scenarios and different types of RPGs exist. They are mainly fantasy- based but there are many others based on aspects of real life with slight differences such as Cthulhu and Dresden.

Tabletop Role Playing Games are conducted mainly through discussion and description and that is why I choose to use them in my proposed idea.

Furthermore, I will continue by explaining the mechanisms of the game and the reasons why I believe that Tabletop RPGs could be an applicable educational tool.

### *Tabletop RPGs (tRPGs)*

Tabletop Role Playing Games, henceforth abbreviated as tRPGs, are an entire genre of games focused on creative storytelling and player interaction. They were initially created on the form of a tabletop game played by a group of friends. One of the players acts as the story teller, commonly referred to as Dungeon Master, or Game Master in the more recent iterations. The rest of the players embody specific characters, created either by them as part of the experience or pre-generated characters assigned to them by the Game Master (GM).

### *Why tRPGs?*

A tRPG, in the hands of a sufficiently dedicated GM, could be an “event” that many things can happen. It can allow for freedom of expression in terms of social interaction, character development, and improvisational decision-making ( J. Shea ,2011). It can provoke emotions and offer experiences and knowledge. The adaptability of a human being creates avenues for a dynamically generated content and a unique experience for the player. Subsequently, I will cite the benefits of a tRPG in the educational process.

### ***General Mechanisms of the tRPG***

#### *-Character creation.*

The setting of the game starts by the creation of a character for each player. Players form a representation of their character in terms of game mechanics. Each character has a set of characteristics that are listed on a special-purpose form called a “character sheet”. Each player has to decide how the character is going to be built. In a non-fantasy based tRPG, players have to state the full name, the age of their character, its outward appearance, occupation, hobbies and all the characteristics that a person might have. In a fantasy based tRPG (such as D&D) there is a slight difference as the choice of a race (specie) such as human or dwarf, of a class(occupation) like cleric, mage, of an alignment (a moral and ethical outlook) and a number of skills and features to enhance the character's basic abilities, is added. In addition, in all settings, fantasy and non-fantasy, each player has to write a background story of the embodied character. Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned the character sheet can also be pre-generated by the storyteller.

#### *-The Game Master.*

The GM plays a crucial role in the progression of a game. He is the storyteller and he partially determines the flow of the game. The game can be played as a single adventure (which can be either custom made by the Game Master or purchased from among a vast selection of premade adventures), a series of adventures, or it can even be a recreation of literature, history or science. The players affect the entire game world, leaving behind their mark as heroic individuals. tRPGs are separated by their game system, which is to say, the kind of mechanics that are used to play the game. Each scene is described by the GM and then, after a pause, the players decide how their characters will react. It is therefore a game of acting, as each player is required to embody their character in any situation.

While tRPGs can be played with strict mechanics that govern most of the gameplay (besides descriptions and interactions), it is also possible to play the game by using a system heavily focused on interaction and acting. The GM may arbitrarily decide if

the action described is a success depending on the level of the description in the current situation as well as keeping in mind how the outcome will add to the drama in progress.

*-The players.*

The players are responsible for the actions of their characters. It is their responsibility to describe the actions that their characters are making. Depending on their actions several different outcomes may occur. Usually, trivial actions are ignored or considered successful. It is the responsibility of the GM to describe the response to their actions and to state where the rolling of a die is necessary. Frequently, dice are only required in complex situations. Several tRPGs rely heavily on dice while others use them only in extreme circumstances and it is the description that the players make that affect the outcome of an encounter. For example, the barter of goods can be determined either by rolling higher than a number of a die or by how successful a character is in negotiating with a Non Player Character (NPC), embodied by the GM.

*-Goals of the game.*

tRPGs are cooperative games and there are no winners or losers in the traditional sense. Every player has personal goals depending on the character he/she has chosen to embody. For example, a player who embodies a journalist can have as a personal goal to be an illustrious editor to an international newspaper. This though is a side goal, because the main purpose is to help the creation of the story and to have fun. As Stratton supports, “Like life, it's not so much whether you win or lose, but how you play the game” (2009).

### **tRPGs in Educational Process**

It is my intention to place the main mechanisms of tRPG in the adult educational process. A tRPG especially designed for educational purposes could be one of the most powerful tools for the educational procedure.

*Adult Educator's Role -The GM*

The aforementioned approach is mainly addressed to adult learners and it is of utmost importance that the educator takes an accommodative and inspirational role to the learning process. It is significant to avoid the traditional, didactic and manipulating character that the traditional theories support.

The educator plays the most important role to this procedure. He is the GM and he leads the story to specific “paths” where he can elicit knowledge, values and he can provoke emotions and attitudes. Mezirow describes the role of the adult educators as follows: “Adult educators are never neutral. They are cultural activists committed to support and extend those canon, social practices, institutions, and Systems that foster fuller freer participation in reflective discourse, transformative learning, reflective action, and a greater realization of agency for all learners. Justification for the norms derived from these commitments is continually open to challenge through critical discourse”. (2000, p.30)

During the game the educator embodies and controls all the auxiliary characters (NPCs) that help the flow of the story. They can also assist learners that get stuck. He never intervenes but he expresses his ideas and convictions. Nevertheless, he is the mediator to an autonomous learning and he is obliged to activate the self-acting of the



learner. Moreover, he is a collaborator, a consultant and not a leading expert.

It is the role of the adult educator, in any educational process, to be determinant since it is important to trigger the learners. Learners have to develop their critical thought, accept opinions of others and the educator should exhort them to be open to new ideas. In addition, I strongly believe that educators must also aid learners to develop their emotional intelligence. (*This perspective is not examined in this paper though*)

#### *The General Benefits of an ongoing tRPG Adventure in the Classroom*

Experiencing an ongoing adventure/scenario for an extended period of time, the adult learners will have the opportunity to bond with their characters and their co-players and hence to develop their personality in every level.

Essentially, the classroom is transformed into a parallel world in which learners/players play their character's lives facing simulations of real life situations. It is a way, for the adult learners, to escape from the reality they live, the difficulties that they face and they enjoy a different but constructive lesson.

Moreover, by using the general mechanisms of the game and the main aforesaid points of TLT and ELT, a tRPG may provide to the learners a multitude of skills and abilities in both cognitive and experiential level. Learners can cultivate their skills. They can increase their:

- observation, comparison, classification and hypothesis skills
- problem generalization, solution finding and their contrivance of solutions
- behavioral evaluation, investigation and prediction skills

Moreover, they can also evolve in finding spatiotemporal connections; they can learn how to compare facts and to formulate inductive and productive syllogisms. Furthermore by playing tRPGs they:

- learn how to interact and grow their interpersonal relationships and initiatives
- learn how to conduct a productive and constructive discussion
- determine their co operational abilities and learn how to manage disagreements and juxtapositions
- increase their capacity to do a research and settle problematic situations
- learn how to configure evaluation criteria, grow their critical thinking and be decision-makers

Summarizing, learners acquire through tRPGs all the skills and abilities that they can acquire in real life, in a short period of time and in a controlled simulated environment.

#### *Goals of Each Session (Session Plan)*

It is significant to mention at this point that it is necessary for the educator to set clear educational objectives for each session of the game. Classification of the objectives is a time consuming procedure but it is the cornerstone for a successful teaching. Despite the storytelling and the side gaming goals it is important to set the educational aims. They are distinguished in three levels for our purposes.

1. Level of knowledge
2. Level of skills
3. Level of attitudes

As far as the first level is concerned, its aim refers to the knowledge that the learners are going to acquire during a session, depending on the subject that is being taught.

The second one refers to the skills that the learners are going to develop after the end of the session and the last one refers to the attitudes in which they are going to adapt concerning the subject that they have been taught.

Concluding, the use of tRPGs in the educational process can be a holistic and integrated educational tool. It can be applied in any existing subject and besides the teaching of a specific cognitive subject it can provide the learner with numerous different experiences and knowledge in any desirable field. In this paper though, I am going to focus only in teaching a language through tRPGs.

### **Language Teaching Through tRPGs**

Even though language learning is a complex process and language in itself has many different aspects, tRPG might be an outstanding language teaching tool, considering that it can link all different aspects of a language learning such as speaking, reading and listening at the same time.

tRPG is a language-centered communication game and inevitably the learners use the target language (the language which is being taught) throughout the duration of the session (lesson), either in oral or written form.

#### *The Benefits of tRPGs in Language Learning*

During the game, as I have already mentioned in the tRPGs' mechanisms, learners describe every action their character intends to do. That gives them the opportunity to use the language in every possible circumstance. For instance, in English language teaching, the educator/GM leads the players/learners (in game) to a shopping center. One of the characters wants to buy a jacket and attempts to negotiate its price. Inevitably, he is going to try to use polite expressions in English. If the learner doesn't have the knowledge to do that he is going to ask for help or he is going to "communicate" through expressions of his own. Thereby, the learners induce or discover grammar rules, experiment and try out what they know, they built up their communicative competence and at the same time they develop accuracy and fluency. They also gain confidence in speaking a foreign language.

It is important at this point, to clarify that this specific approach can be used by learners of an intermediate level up to proficient ones. It is also possible to adapt the approach to an elementary level, for instance by using a simpler vocabulary.

Furthermore, the conduct of the educational procedure could be more efficient and functional in a class of 5 to 7 learners at top.

#### *Educator's Role in Language Teaching*

As I mentioned before the educator/GM has a certain role to the educational procedure. Specifically, in language teaching the educator /GM must fulfill his set goals of the lesson/session plan but he must be tolerant with the learner's errors and through conversations as an NPC, he can guide them towards a better and proper use and understanding of a language. For example, if his set goal is a specific vocabulary he must evoke its use, leading them through the scenario and providing as an NPC the solution to their problem.

Summing up, when tRPGs are played as an ongoing adventure, they have as their focal aim to give the opportunity to the learners to build and develop their characters in every level, over time. Without even noticing it, learners will expand their vocabulary and their oral and written skills. As Aristotle, the Greek philosopher wrote in his second book "The nicomachean Ethics" of Moral Virtue "For the things we

have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them”. By expanding this quote, we can say that we learn a language by using it first and then we understand it and analyze it.

### **Conclusion**

Concluding, I would like to suggest a new orientation in adult educational process and specifically in language teaching through the usage of tRPGs.

Both the theories of ELT and TLT indicate a perspective of learning in which experience plays a significant role. They provide a multilinear model of adult development, which is consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop.

From my viewpoint, the experience gained, the change in the perception of how knowledge is acquired by learners, the different approach of language learning and the behavioral examples being given (among others) are the most noteworthy aspects of teaching a language through tRPGs. “Learning may be intentional, incidental or mindlessly assimilative” (Mezirow, 2000, p.5)

Language is a living organism that contains universality. This means that language is not only a simple set of symbols or a communicative code. It is a value, a social product and of course an element of culture. Ed.Sapir stresses that “the content of language is intimately related to culture, the latter defined as the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives” (SL, 219,207)

The nature of the game besides language teaching offers the mental and emotional stimulation that can trigger and develop the emotional intelligence of the learners. As defined in Cardwell's “Role playing Games and the gifted student”, “there are several language and non-language based learning skills developed directly when students become involved with RPGs”. This is how we can emphasize on the psych pedagogic role of the game.

Thus, we can effortlessly infer that there is a great deal of similarity of what the two theories provide to the learner and what tRPGs can offer by applying to the game the principles of these theories.

tRPGs are heavily focused on interaction and acting ,they can simulate the experience of any aspect of life and they can provoke a variety of emotions. Some people characterize them as “The theatre of Mind”. This characterization appears to have merit since playing tRPGs is like playing theatre. There is a plot; there are protagonists, antagonists, sub-plots, conflicts, climaxes, anti-climaxes and everything that is related to everyday situations.

This paper has provided the theoretical background, the definition and mechanisms of tRPGs and the reasons why I strongly believe that tRPGs are the perfect tool to be used in language learning in adults. In order to gain a thorough understanding in using tRPGs in language teaching, it is necessary to conduct a study that examines all the aspects of this approach.

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## **Transformations of Adult Learners' Perceptions and Attitudes towards ICT. Case study of trainees in a Greek Second Chance School**

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**Abstract:** This case study aimed at investigating possible transformations regarding perceptions and attitudes towards ICT of SCS trainees in Lamia, Greece. Data were collected through interviews and observation and interpreted with TL theory. Results showed that schooling contributed positively, by transforming trainees' negative attitudes to positive and enhancing their positive ones.

### **Introduction**

ICT has reformed and influenced decisively almost all sectors of human activity (Primo, 2003). Digital competence is one of the eight key competences for the knowledge society (European Communities, 2007).

However, digital divide and digital illiteracy create new kind of inequalities and discriminations for big groups of population, a fact extremely negative in the knowledge and information society. As it has been pointed out: "With all the talk about the *information superhighway*, many people feel the need for *driving lessons* so as not to get left by the roadside" (OECD, 2000, p. 77-78).

Particular problems face:

- Those with special needs or physical disability.
- The socially and economically deprived.
- Linguistic and ethnic minorities.
- Groups suffering social exclusion.
- The geographically remote.
- Older citizens.
- The technologically-alienated or apathetic (OECD, *ibid*, p. 53).

In disadvantaged position are, therefore, mainly the vulnerable groups which cannot access ICT, but also those with 'computer anxiety/phobia' or 'technophobia', terms used to describe individuals who feel threatened by computers or avoid or resist new technology, thus having a negative attitude to ICT (Brosnan, 1998).

### **Second Chance Schools (SCS) and their trainees**

In Greece, when adults who have dropped out of formal education want to complete compulsory education, they have mainly two options. The first one is the evening High School, which has the same structure and characteristics as the school from which they dropped out as children.

The second option is the SCSs. In these, the curriculum, in the 2 school years required for graduation, is open and flexible. Their starting point is the diagnosis of trainees' needs concerning knowledge and skills. The pedagogical approaches are compatible with the principles of adult education with an emphasis on the trainees' active participation. The teaching methodology is based on experiential and participatory techniques. The trainers at SCSs are chosen (not appointed, as it is the case in the rest of the schools) according to their qualifications, abilities and experience in adult education (Greek Government Gazette, 2008).

As it has been pointed out (OECD, 2000, p. 81), those who have dropped out of school often come to adult education with negative educational experiences, expectations, beliefs that they will fail once again and fears that the formal adult

education will be 'mean more of the same'.

Specifically for the trainees of the Greek SCSs, the factors that led to their school drop-out were: a) family reasons, b) negative school experiences and c) reasons that had to do with themselves: immaturity, lack of self-confidence etc. (Vergidis, 2004). Their habitus led them to a negative attitude towards the school constitution, as well as to lack of self-confidence, resulting in them having diminished expectations. The school, ignoring the educational and social inequalities, led to further decrease of 'bad' students' already low self-esteem. As a result, they internalized their school failure as reasonable (Landritsi, 2007). This is not, of course, as correctly stressed in the aforementioned research, deterministic, because after years they have decided to study at the SCS.

### **Transformational Learning (TL) Theory**

Mezirow's TL theory centers on the role of learning process in transforming how a person views the world and themselves (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

According to it, we make meaning out of the world through our experiences (Cranton & Roy, 2003); specifically, through our *frames of references*, the coherent body of experience an adult has acquired which sets out one's 'line of action'. This happens because we have 'a proclivity for categorical judgment', with our expectations, based on previous experiences, often becoming self-fulfilling prophecies (Mezirow, 2003).

A frame of reference comprises habits of mind and points of view. *Habits of mind* are 'set of assumptions-broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience' (Mezirow, 2007, p.56). They include a variety of dimensions: sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic. A habit of mind is expressed as a *point of view*, which comprises *clusters of meaning schemes*: "sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and judgments, that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality" (Mezirow, *ibid*, p.57).

Our internalized frames of reference often consist of erroneous and distorted values, beliefs, assumptions and subsequent expectations, thus making our incorporation into reality dysfunctional. In this disjunctive situation, the personal construction of the reality is transformed after reflection upon experience and development of new strategies deriving from this evaluation of the situation (Mezirow, 2007; Jarvis, 2004; Kokkos, 2005).

Mezirow suggests learning transformations come about due to one of four ways: elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, transforming habits of mind.

The triggering event for transformation is a *disorienting dilemma*, a critical event in one's life. Transformations often follow some variation of the following phases (Mezirow, 2007, pp.60-61):

1. Disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. Critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

However, this is not necessarily a linear procedure, nor do all learners follow all phases (Taylor, 2007).

The way context-among other factors- affects TL has been only superficially examined, although having been proven by research to be significant (Taylor, *ibid*).

## **Methodology**

### *Research questions*

- a) What were the trainees' perceptions and attitudes regarding ICT prior to their schooling in SCS?
- b) Have they been transformed or positively reinforced during attending ICT classes in SCS?
- c) How has SCS contributed to this possible transformation?

### *Research sample and limitations*

The research was conducted in 2013 in the SCS of Lamia, Central Greece. An availability sample (Kyriazi, 2002, p.117-118) of 15 trainees was used. Therefore, the research findings are not generalizable. The trainees' profile was: 8 trainees were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> school year and 7 in the 1<sup>st</sup>. Women were 11 and men 4. Their ages ranged from 34 to 45 years old. 7 trainees were employees in the private sector, 6 unemployed and 2 civil servants.

### *Data collection*

Data were collected with semi-structured interviews, which are used to measure knowledge or information, values and preferences, attitudes and beliefs (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.351).

We triangulated data collection by using observation, which allows the researcher to "...look directly at what is taking place *in situ* rather than relying on second-hand accounts" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, *ibid*, p.396).

Trainees were observed for 4 hours in total (2 hours for each school year). The researcher, who was 'observer as participant' (Kyriazi, 2002, p. 255), used rating scales and kept notes.

## **Analysis of Results**

### *1<sup>st</sup> Research Question*

All trainees of the sample had already acknowledged the usefulness and necessity of the application of ICT in people's life before their schooling at SCS, although a skeptical attitude can be detected in their views:

*Rightly or wrongly, they are necessary in people's lives, always, of course, in moderation (T8).*

*Of greatest importance. They should exist in our lives, because they help us both socially and professionally. Today, whoever hasn't basic knowledge on computers is regarded as illiterate. (T12).*

However, regarding their computer attitude *before* their schooling at SCS, they can be classified in two groups: in group A, with 9 trainees (4 from the 1<sup>st</sup> school year and 5 from the 2<sup>nd</sup>) who had a skeptical attitude towards the ICT, and group B, with 6 trainees (3 from each school year) who had a positive attitude. The classification criteria were their general perception of computers, the grade of (autonomous) use of



computers, their regarding of computer use as easy or difficult, the existence or non-existence of fear feelings of computer use.

More specifically, the trainees of group A had a phobic or skeptical perception of computers:

*I was afraid, I wasn't sure if I would be able to cope with the lessons. In general, I had no self-confidence and I wasn't sure whether I would be able to do to what I would be asked to (T11).*

*As I had never the chance to use them before, I never really liked them; I was a little skeptical and scared, to be honest (T13).*

These trainees either did not have a computer at home; or they owned a computer, but they did not use it; or they used it occasionally; or they used it only when helped by another person:

*No, I didn't have a computer (T5).*

*Yes, [I used it] a little. When I used the internet, my son helped me (T11).*

More specifically, none of the trainees of this group used the Office programs, mainly due to ignorance:

*No, no, I had no idea (T5).*

As far as the internet is concerned, some of them did not use it at all, some others a little and some others only when helped by others. Still, the ones who used it felt insecure:

*No, I never used the internet (T10).*

*Yes, sometimes, mostly in order to find some information. I felt insecure, but there was usually someone by me who was aware of what I visited, because I couldn't do it on my own (T4).*

The internet use was intimidating for everyone, even for those who used it only a little:

*I was very afraid, there are a lot of traps in internet and you must know how to use it. I never used it on my own, because I was afraid that I would press something I shouldn't or visit a page I shouldn't (T7).*

They regarded the use of computers as difficult:

*I'd say difficult. I felt a little insecure, although I had some knowledge, I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to cope with it on my own (T8).*

*Difficult, all that seemed overwhelming to me (T15).*

The factors that made the use of PC difficult were mainly the lack of knowledge and of self-confidence and, in some cases, the combination of the two with the lack of a computer at home, or of a teacher:

*My lack of self-confidence, which maybe stemmed from the lack of the appropriate knowledge. Maybe I hadn't dealt with it as much as I should (T8).*

*The lack of knowledge. But I had neither a computer at home in order to get involved, nor a person, who would show me (T5).*

On the other hand, the trainees of group B had a positive perception of PCs, and some of them had already attended seminars related to them:

*I was not at all skeptical towards the use of PCs; I really liked to use them (T1).*

*Positive, I regarded them as useful in our daily life, that's why I had attended seminars about them (T12).*

These trainees had a computer at home and used it on their own, autonomously.

*Yes, I owned a computer and I used it myself (T9).*

They often or everyday used the Office programs and some more specialized programs for professional, social or personal reasons:

*Of course, for both professional, when I used to work constantly, and social reasons*

(T2).

*Yes, Word and Power Point, mostly for my work and, sometimes, in order to help my children with their school projects (T12).*

*Yes, Word and Access, mostly for my work (T14).*

They often or daily used internet for professional (mainly) and recreational reasons:

*Yes, of course, on a daily basis, for both professional and recreational reasons, more for professional reasons (T1).*

*Yes, I often used the internet to find information, but it helped me a lot at work, too (T6).*

They regarded the use of the PC as easy, because they had the necessary knowledge:

*Easy, because I had the necessary knowledge (T1).*

*Easy, because I had the ECDL certificate (T2).*

The use of Internet did not scare them, although some of them felt some insecurity:

*No, not at all (T9).*

*No, because I visited only what I wanted and I was familiar with (T14).*

They regarded the use of PC as easy, although some concerns were expressed related to the absence of the necessary knowledge:

*I didn't face many difficulties (T12).*

*The use was concerning me, because I didn't have the appropriate knowledge (T6).*

#### *2<sup>nd</sup> Research Question:*

The trainees of group A transformed their previous skeptical attitude towards ICT into positive through their schooling at SCS. More specifically:

Their perception/view of computers has now become positive. As one trainee underlines, she now feels surprised at what one can do with PCs and regrets not having learnt to use them before:

*Yes, it has changed; it's more positive, I'm more comfortable with computers, although there is lot more to learn (T11).*

*Now that I've started to learn, I like computers and, sure, I am more positive towards them (T13).*

*I'm more positive, I've seen how many things I can do with computers and I'm surprised; I regret, that I hadn't learnt them before (T10).*

They think that PC learning has helped them mainly on a social and recreational level. Fewer have been helped on a professional level, because most of them either do not work or the use of a PC is not required at work.

*It has helped me, mainly socially, because now I'm familiar with the internet services and I can communicate with people with whom I couldn't before; or I spend my time playing various games (T4).*

*Professionally no, because I don't work, but in general yes. Especially with internet I can communicate with many of my acquaintances, and, also, find information about whatever I want (T10).*

*On a social level, a lot, now I have my own email and Skype and I can communicate fast and free of charge with people who are in different places, even with my relatives who live abroad. Professionally, I haven't been helped because I don't work (T7).*

They have introduced the PC services to their work and daily life: they use Internet every day, they look for information and entertain themselves and they use the social media. Even a trainee who did not own and use a computer, intends to buy one now and, until then, uses her daughter's computer:

*Yes, of course! In my free time I play various games on the computer and now I use internet everyday (T7).*

*Yes, at work and at home (T8).*

*Yes, although there is a lot more to learn, I use the computer at home, I play games and I use the internet, I listen to music and I find information (T13).*

*Yes, I use them, mainly the internet, I have Facebook, e-mail and I use the search engines in order to find information (T11).*

*I try, I don't have a computer at home, I intend to buy one. I usually use it here, at school, and at my daughter's house, where I even use the internet (T15).*

Most of them devote now more time to the PC, whereas, some others do not, due to lack of time. However, even that way, the time they spend is of more quality:

*Yes, since I didn't use it before at all (T15).*

*Yes, because the more you use it, the more you learn (T10).*

*Not much, I just know what I'm doing now; my time is of more quality (T4).*

They want to attend a more specialized training course on ICT in the future, which is an important sign of their attitude transformation:

*Yes, I would like to, in the future; now that I've made a start and realized how much I like computers, I wouldn't like to stop learning and using it, it's interesting (T10).*

On the other hand, the trainees of group B reinforced their previous positive attitude towards ICT through their schooling at SCS.

More specifically:

They have reinforced (sometimes significantly) their positive perception of PCs:

*Quite a lot, I'm 70% more positive (T6).*

Although they already knew how to use a computer, they think that the Digital Literacy lessons at SCS have helped them on professional and social level:

*Although I was on an advanced level, there is always more to learn and I think that they have helped me to enrich my knowledge (T1).*

*Quite a lot, on both professional and social level (T6).*

They have introduced the service of PCs and Internet to their daily life either for their work or for social reasons, or for information and recreation:

*Yes, mainly for recreational reasons, because I don't work at the moment (T2).*

*Yes, I use very often the search engines, the e-mail and the social media (T9)*

*Yes, of course, both at work and at home. I usually use internet at home, it makes me relax, I read the daily news instead of buying newspapers and I listen to my favorite music (T14).*

They devote either the same or, most of them, more hours in front of the computer in comparison with the past:

*I devote the same time (T9).*

*Now I devote more hours (T12).*

They express their desire to attend a more specialized training course on ICT, which indicates the reinforcement of their positive attitude:

*Of course, in order to enrich my knowledge (T2).*

*Sure, I don't know much, yet (T14).*

From the observation sheets the following data emerge:

Regarding their familiarity with the use of PCs, all trainees of the sample (even 6 from group A) were quite to very familiar, except 3 of the 1<sup>st</sup> school year (from group A).

Additionally, all trainees of the sample were friendly towards the internet services, since 14 out of 15 did not seem to face any problems with their application.

Moreover, all 6 trainees of group B (3 from each school year) and 3 trainees of group A (from the 2<sup>nd</sup> school year) performed the tasks with absolute ease, whereas the remaining 6 of group A (4 from the 1<sup>st</sup> school year and 2 from the 2<sup>nd</sup>) on a quite

satisfactory level.

Only 4 trainees of the sample (from group A) did not have such a high grade of autonomy concerning the tasks that they were asked to perform on their own, whereas the remaining 5 from group A and all 6 trainees from group B showed a high grade of autonomy.

During the training process, 3 out of 7 trainees of the 1<sup>st</sup> school year and 1 out of 8 of the 2<sup>nd</sup>, all belonging to group A, expressed a low grade of anxiety. The other 11 (all 6 of group B and 5 of group A) had self-confidence during the lesson.

All trainees participated with interest during the training process, even the 3 from group A who didn't feel yet quite familiar with ICT.

An interesting finding was the fact that, with the exception of 3 trainees of group A (from the 1<sup>st</sup> school year), the remaining 12 trainees of both groups used during the lesson, even for a little time, a service that PCs offer for non-educational purpose, which indicates the grade of familiarity with ICT and their increased self-confidence concerning the ICT use.

The observation data, therefore, are in complete agreement with those from the interviews, confirming the transformation of the skeptical attitude towards ICT of group A and the reinforcement of the positive attitude of group B. Of course, the longer involvement in ICT increases the ability, self-confidence and autonomy, as it was shown from the differences between the trainees of the 2 school years.

### *3<sup>rd</sup> Research Question*

Regarding the question if they are satisfied with the cooperation – communication with their trainer, the trainees of both groups expressed very positive opinions:

*Yes, absolutely (T4).*

The trainer's help, support and encouragement were so determinant, especially for the trainees of group A, that some trainees feel that they would still be afraid to turn on the computer without him:

*Of course, I wouldn't have made it on my own (T11).*

*He has helped me a lot. If it wasn't for his help, I would still be afraid to turn the computer on (T13).*

The trainees of group B also think that he helped them a lot:

*Yes, a quite a lot (T10).*

*Yes, although I didn't face any problems, because I was already familiar with it (T9).*

From the analysis of the observation sheets the following data were obtained:

Concerning the cooperation – communication level among the trainees of the sample, it was observed that all of them cooperated, when needed, harmoniously during tasks, in a safe climate. The trainees of the 2<sup>nd</sup> school year (who belonged to both groups) were characterized by a stronger team spirit, which can be possibly attributed to the fact that they had known each other for a longer time and the climate of safety and communication was more developed.

The level of cooperation – communication between the trainees and the trainer was very high.

All trainees were given enough support and encouragement by their trainer. The 'weaker', regarding the use and familiarity with ICT, trainees received more support by the trainer, so as not to face any problems during the training process.

The data from the observation confirm, therefore, the good cooperation and communication both among trainees and between trainees and trainers, as well as the support and encouragement that the trainer offered the trainees.

Concerning their opinion about the educational material of Digital Literacy, the

trainees of group A believe that it is helpful for them, because it is written in a simple and comprehensible way:

*It helps me, it is simply written and I consult it a lot (T13).*

*It helped me, it was simple and comprehensible (T8).*

The trainees of group B also expressed positive opinions:

*It's very good and useful (T6).*

*It's well-written and comprehensible (T14).*

Regarding the level of satisfaction with the ICT infrastructure of the SCS, all trainees of the sample are very satisfied, with some trainees of group B expressing the desire for more modern computers:

*Yes, I'm satisfied; there is no problem or lack of something (T1).*

*The computers are old, but, in general, everything is fine (T6).*

*Yes, it's fine, sometimes the internet is slow (T7).*

*The computers are more than enough (T14).*

All trainees of the sample argue that the teaching methods helped them to develop a more positive perception of the PCs; it was also mentioned that they were interesting:

*No, they weren't difficult for me, they help us; we spend a lot of time in front of the computer (T3).*

*They help us, they are interesting (T10).*

Hence, the SCS contributed decisively to the reinforcement of the previous positive attitude towards the trainees of group B, as well as to the transformation of the skeptical attitude of group A into a positive one.

### **Data interpretation**

The trainees of group A came to SCS having experienced school failure and possibly having negative school experiences and low self-feeling as far as education is concerned. Analogous phobic feelings and low self-estimation concerning ICT emerged from the research data. Therefore, in the beginning they had negative predispositions due to their epistemic and psychological *habits of mind*. These were expressed as points of view, consisting of *clusters of meaning schemes*, which consisted of low expectations concerning the possibility of school success at SCS, in general, and in Digital Literacy, in specific. Having internalized unconsciously the previous failure, they automatically and, as later proved, arbitrarily formed the belief that they will not be able to cope with it (again) and, therefore, they kept a skeptical attitude towards ICT.

Their return to education, in general, and the problematic experience -the ICT use- they had to face, in specific, were a disorienting dilemma to them. Therefore, during Digital Literacy they probably went through all or some of the other phases of TL. More specifically:

- *Self-examination; critical assessment of assumptions.* They critically evaluated their erroneous assumptions and experiences, regarding ICT use, assisted by their trainers and the other trainees. The climate of safety and cooperation that was detected during the observation seems to have contributed to that.
- *Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared; exploration of options for new roles, relationships, actions.* Through the training process and the cooperation-communication with the other trainees, they shared their experiences and knowledge, seeking new assumptions and lines of action regarding ICT.

- *Planning a course of action; acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; provisional trying of new roles.* They acquired new ICT knowledge or reinforced their pre-existing knowledge and began to implement it both in the training process and in their daily life. SCS contributed significantly to that (infrastructure, teaching methods, educational material, encouragement and support from the trainer).
- *Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.* In the end, the trainees neither felt insecure concerning the ICT, nor expressed anxiety, as they felt familiar with its use. They implemented autonomously the ICT services and benefited from that on personal, social and professional level.

Hence, the trainees of this group, at least on the level of instrumental knowledge (Mezirow, 2007, p. 48), transformed their points of view concerning the ICT and their attitude from skeptical into positive.

Regarding the trainees of group B, the learning process of Digital Literacy at SCS reinforced their already positive attitude. This is proved from the fact that they have introduced it more in their daily life. Even those who devote as much time as before, they acknowledge that that time is now of more quality. Some of them mention that they have improved their computer skills demanded at their work. Others have been assisted on social level, as they have exploited more and more effectively the ways of communication that ICT offer, whereas others have benefited on recreational level.

The reinforcement of their positive attitude is due to the fact that they have acquired more knowledge. The SCS has offered them this chance through methodology, educational material and trainers appropriate for adulthood and their needs.

### **Conclusion**

The trainees of the sample either transformed their prior skeptical attitude towards ICT into positive or reinforced their already positive one. In both cases, the contribution of SCS to that seems to be not only important, but also, concerning the first case, determinant. It is confirmed, once again, that the educational environment (infrastructure, curriculum, educational material, teaching methodology, trainers, climate and relationships) is a determinant factor for school success or failure (if we take into consideration the school of which the trainees had dropped out). At the same time – and this is probably more important- school, regarded as *context*, seems to be able, if it fulfills the appropriate conditions, to contribute significantly to the transformation of a person's problematic assumptions that affect negatively their life in general.

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**COLLECTIVE AND THE INDIVIDUAL**



**Transformative Learning, individual and/or social change:  
how to come out of a tricky issue ?**

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**Abstract**

A widespread representation radically opposes individual and social change, education and politics. How could a theory of TL take into account both individual and collective change and how are they related ? On what foundation could we build up an in-depth reflection on this complex issue ?

A widespread representation radically opposes individual and social change. This habit of mind consists in thinking that they are about two different agendas, two kinds of projects concerning separate domains : education and politics. Thus it puts on one hand the functions of educators who act at the level of individuals, teaching, upbringing and training children or adults ; and on the other hand the role of citizens and politicians who act at a collective level in order to improve the social situation and conditions, to reduce injustice, or even to struggle against domination and exploitation and radically transform the society.

On this basis some criticism has been addressed to Transformative Learning (TL) theory and to certain authors claiming to adhere to TL. It criticizes them for focusing their project on individual cognitive or psychic change, and for forgetting that individual knowledge, attitudes and behavior are broadly influenced, if not determined by the ruling ideology, social norms, structures and relations. Faced with such criticism, defenders of TL can call on some arguments based on interactionism and/or constructivism, at least on some works ranked under these labels. But the discussion come to the endless debate between methodological individualism and holism, between a psychological approach and a sociological determinism.

Is it possible to go beyond a disjunctive thought (either...or...) and to come in a conjunctive thought (and... and...), in the Edgar Morin's wake (Morin & Le Moigne 1999) and his "Intelligence de la complexité". He taught us that we can take into account the individual, awareness, thought, "sans réduire l'humain à la seule individualité" (Morin 2001, 45). Following Morin, the concept of "human" is defined by three complementary notions : individual, society and human race. Their relation is dialogical : human race is formed by all the individuals, but in every individual there is all that constitutes the human race. Just as society is made up of individuals and every individual is totally social, formed by the process of socialization and by his membership of some groups, community and society. From his birth the group give him a name, an identity. The paradoxical characteristic of identity has been argued by Paul Ricoeur. Thus each one is *idem*, similar to the other humans, and *ipse*, himself, unique. The intelligence of complexity avoid to keep shut in false discussions, to overcome disciplinary compartmentalizations and to reunify knowledge by linking biology, psychology and culture or social sciences (Morin 2001, 49).

**Different perspectives on TL: individual change or social transformation ?**

When I was writing this paper, I have been reading the Reflections on the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference (2005) and especially the introduction by Patricia Cranton. She evoked "many presentations focused on intuitive, imaginative, arts-based and holistic approaches; and at the same time, people

working within the rational, cognitive perspective...". In her closing words, she reminded us of the Taylor's "multifaceted concept of TL theory", which distinguishes seven approaches of TL (Cranton in JTED 4/2 2006, p. 155). Three approaches are rather oriented towards individual change and their names begin by "psycho-", and the other are directed to social transformation, discriminated groups, cultural or planetary dimensions. Also, Elisabeth Kasl mentioned that "the conference have been alive with attention to Jungian and other transpersonal perspectives on transformation, emancipatory learning linked to social justice and social action, and the importance of engaging whole persons in multiple dimensions...". She expressed her "hope that this conference will become a comfortable home for all who seek to forge theories and practices about profound change in human systems at the levels of both the individual and the collective."

How could a theory of TL take into account both individual and collective levels, and how are they related ? On what foundation could we build up an in-depth reflection on this complex issue ? I consider that it is possible to clarify this issue on the basis of some solid philosophical and anthropological concepts and to avoid pointless debates opposing education and politics, or individual vs social change. For this purpose, I argue that it is necessary to call again on two theoretical texts from two old-fashioned authors: Karl Marx and Marcel Mauss. The first one is "*Ad Feuerbach*" (1845), particularly the third and the sixth thesis; the second is the paper "*Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie*" (Actual and practical relations between psychology and sociology, 1924). My paper is aimed to comment these texts showing that one can find in their contents the grounding of the Devereux's idea of "complementarism" and the argument that Bourdieu, in the *Méditations pascaliennes*, refers to "*la double vérité*" (the double truth). Then, on the foundation of these works, I will present a conception of TL taking into account the complexity of the processes at stake and the richness of the interactions between the micro and the macro scales, between individuals, society and human race, as Edgar Morin (2001), in the 5th volume of "*La méthode: l'identité humaine*", brought them to light.

### **Karl Marx : the third and the sixth thesis "ad Feuerbach"**

3. *The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated.(...). The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [Selbstveränderung] can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice [revolutionäre Praxis].*

The third thesis is about education (*Erziehung*) and about the transformation of men by education and circumstances. Marx considers that education has to be transformed in order to change men and that educators need to be educated. Moreover, only men's activity can (and must) change the circumstances (Umstände), the social relations and the political context that contributes to form men as they are in a given period of history. And this context, these circumstances must be changed to produce different men and women, no more alienated men and women, but emancipated men and women. But how to get out of the aporia, the vicious circle of alienation and reproduction ? Marx answers : by a self-change conceived as a revolutionary praxis, both a change of education, particularly of the education of educators and a transformation of the social relations. And this self-change is possible because of the coincidence of a new education and a transformed political and social action - a transformative action on the minds and a changing action on the social relations, on

the ways of acting and thinking that form and reproduce the society and the humans, members of this society. History is the product of this dialectics between reproduction and transformation resulting of the praxis, the human activity in the fields of education and the social and political affairs.

*6. Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man [menschliche Wesen]. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations. (...)*

The sixth thesis is about the Marx's conception of man, of the essence of man [*menschliche Wesen*]. It is not into an abstract nature of individual ; its reality is "the ensemble of social relations". Man is formed by the relations that link him to others. It is the same idea argued by Edgar Morin : human being as social being and dialogical relation between individual and society. Yet Aristote was calling man : "*zoon politikon*". This expression refers to men as indissociable from their city, as living being (*zoon*) and as social being, members of the *polis*, citizen (*politikon*). And Felix Guattari, in a text first published in 1985 and recently republished (Guattari 2013), concludes : "*L'individu n'est au fond que l'intersection de composantes institutionnelles*", in other words : basically, individual is the intersection of the social relations and institutions in which he is directly or indirectly involved.

### **Marcel Mauss and the relations between psychology and sociology**

In his paper "Rapports réels et pratiques de la psychologie et de la sociologie", Marcel Mauss begins by placing sociology and psychology within anthropology, "*le total des sciences qui considèrent l'homme comme être vivant, conscient et sociable*" (the total of sciences that consider man as live being, aware and sociable). Then, the author distinguishes human societies from animal societies ; human societies are characterized by communication of ideas, language, practical and aesthetic arts, religions, all these institutions that are specific of our common life. And he adds "*ce sont celles-ci qui nous font non seulement homme social, mais même homme tout court.*" (that made us not only social man, but simply man).

Mauss develops the mutual services that do psychology and sociology one another. Psychology particularly give to the sociologist a better understanding of the collective representations, their functioning, their description with precise terms and clearly defined concepts. He takes several examples in the fields of psycho-pathology, symbols and symbolic activity, which helps to explain not only individual psychism but also an important part of myths, rituals and collective beliefs. Then he broaches the contribution of the sociology to the psychology : firstly the study of languages as social phenomena, but also physiological and psychological ones. He describes social life as "*un monde de rapports symboliques*" (a world of symbolic relations) and evokes rhythm, songs, where social, psychological and physiological phenomena coincide. And he adds "always, in all these fields, the general psychological fact appears in its clarity because it is social; it is common to all the people who participate".

In his conclusion, Mauss calls for a study of the complete man and the concrete man, that goes beyond the study of separate human faculties. In all the works of Mauss one finds this concern about studying human and social phenomena as a whole, as global realities, with their social, psychological and physical dimensions. Edgar Morin will take up and develop this perspective, as I have mentioned.

### **A convergence with Devereux and Bourdieu**

This perspective comes close to the notion of complementarity developed by George Devereux. The most well-known book of this author is "From Anxiety to Method in the Behavioral Sciences" (1967), but it is in another book : "Ethnopsychanalyse complémentaire", published in 1972, that this notion is explained, specially in the introduction titled "argument".

*"Dans l'étude de l'homme (...) il est non seulement possible mais obligatoire d'expliquer un comportement déjà expliqué d'une manière, aussi d'une autre manière - c'est à dire dans le cadre d'un autre système de référence."*

*"De plus, c'est précisément la possibilité d'expliquer "complètement" un phénomène humain d'au moins deux manières (complémentaires) qui démontre, d'une part, que le phénomène en question est à la fois réel et explicable, et, d'autre part, que chacune de ses deux explications est complète (et donc valable) dans son propre cadre de référence" (1985, p. 13).*

My translation : "studying man, it is not only possible but obligatory to explain a behavior already explained in a way, in another way, in another frame of reference. A human phenomenon has to be explained with two different and complementary ways in order to prove that it is both real and explainable and that each explanation is complete (valid) in his own frame of reference". Devereux argues that this double discourse cannot be simultaneously expressed by the same researcher, even if they are in a relation of complementarity between both of them. The author consider that this notion of complementarity in the domain of social science is equivalent to the Heisenberg's principle of uncertainty in physics.

This perspective is also close to the idea of "double truth" developed by Bourdieu in the "Méditations pascaliennes" (Seuil, 1997, 225). It consists to argue that one cannot confined himself neither to sociological (determinist) objectivism, considering that there is a social world that one can treat like a thing (Cf. Durkheim), meaning that the points of view of agents are treated as illusions, nor to be satisfied by the subjectivist vision for which the social world is the result of the addition of all the representations and the wills. We have to take into account this two truths : on one hand, the psychological truth (reality) coming from the subjectivity of actors and their individual acts, but also to their thoughts, their personal feelings, and on the other hand, the sociological truth (reality) of norms, structures and cultures, in short social phenomena. One can explain the same phenomenon in a satisfactory way by each of these discourses, but the comprehension will be richer if it is successively explained by both of them, because they are complementary.

To pose the question in term of preeminence or anteriority of the psychological on the social or the opposite is meaningless. The human behavior is entirely social and psychological. Another author, Alban Bensa develops the same idea and criticizes the opposition between holism and individualism ; he argues that this duality does not explains anything because the individual cannot be thought outside society and vice versa (Bensa 2010, 25).

### **What are consequences for the theory of TL ?**

The issues of education and learning, especially of transformative learning are a matter for this double truth. More generally, individual change and social change, as well as social reproduction and rigid individual behavior are the two sides of the same medal. One can focus on one or the other side, but it would be erroneous to reduce the phenomenon (of change or of reproduction) to only one dimension. Considering social reproduction, the weight of norms and dominant ideology forwarded by education and continuously repeated by social discourses largely determine the way the majority of people act and think. But submission to the authority of the norms can be explained by some psychological mechanisms like the relation with the Law, the super-ego and culpability.

More precisely concerning the theory of TL, it is defined by J. Mezirow on the occasion of his dialogue with J. Dirkx as :

"This rational process of learning within awareness is a metacognitive application of critical thinking that transforms an acquired frame of reference - a mind-set or worldview of orienting assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs and concepts - by assessing its epistemic assumptions.

This process makes frames of reference more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective and emotionally able to change. Frames with these qualities generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action." (Dirkx & al. 2006, 124).

In this discussion, Mezirow contrasts his perspective of TL with "Jungian and other transpersonal perspectives on transformation" defended by J. Dirkx. Without taking a stand on this issue, I will rather consider the way it is possible to integrate both the individual and collective dimensions of TL. For this purpose, I call on Gilbert Simondon's work and on the paper "Simondon et l'invention du transindividuel" by B. Aspe (2013).

How an in depth change of the frame of reference used by number of individuals could contribute to transform their social environment ? How is it possible to go from conscientisation to social transformation, in the terms of P. Freire ? The analyses of Simondon in his book *"L'individuation psychique et collective"* (1989) can throw light on this process. First of all, the author asserts that an individual has to be placed in relation to his natural, technical and social milieu and that he is really existing only within his network of relations. Then individual is only a step within a dynamics, a provisional result in a continuous process of individuation. Finally, individual, as any life being, is able to modify his structures according to the problem he is confronted with during his individuation. It is particularly the case when he is confronted with conflicts, contradictions, dilemmas that provoke emotions or anxiety. In order to modify his structures, his frames of reference, his beliefs, he has to transform his emotions into actions in the world. And he can only act within a collective. *"C'est seulement dans l'expérience transindividuelle que l'émotion s'accomplit dans une action commune - dans un réseau d'actes."* (It is only in a transindividual experience that emotion ends up in a common action). Thus *"la relation transindividuelle traverse les individus en les incorporant à une réalité plus vaste qu'eux : un système de résonance."* ... *"donnant naissance à cet être nouveau, un collectif transindividuel"...* (qui) *"suppose l'invention de structures et d'opérations... pouvant constituer des éléments d'une invention politique"* (Aspe 2013, 78). (The transindividual relation comes through individuals and incorporate them into a wider reality : a system of resonance (...)) giving birth to this new being, a transindividual collective that

supposes the invention of structures and operations (...) able to form the elements of a political creation).

Simondon uses the metaphor of crystallization in order to describe these phenomena of individual or collective individuation. But the important thing is this transformation of emotion, through the collective, into action. Mezirow, following Freire, adds the conscious, rational dimension of the TL, condition for an efficient and just action. Aspe, for his part, put the stress on the ethical and political dimension. His perspective comes close to the notion of "micropolitics" or to the molecular revolution of Felix Guattari and as a conclusion I will refer to a last quotation that is good summary of my speech :

*"La véritable politique que j'ai essayé d'englober dans l'expression "révolution moléculaire" (...) concerne le rapport des grands groupes sociaux à leur environnement, à leur mode de fonctionnement économique, mais aussi les attitudes qui traversent la vie individuelle, familiale, la vie inconsciente, la vie artistique, etc."* (Guattari 2013, 583).

(The true politics, that I tried to include in the expression "molecular revolution" is about the relation of the large social groups with their environment, their economic mode of functioning, but also the attitudes coming through the individual life, the family, the unconscious life, the artistic life, etc.").

A theory of TL, in my vision, has to take into account macro social, economical and political realities as well as processes at the individual scale, the small or larger groups (gender, ethnic groups, social classes, cultures, etc.) and the complex interactions between these different levels. It seems to be relatively easy to say it... it is, no doubt, more difficult to do.

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## **Opportunities and Constraints of Transformative Learning: The Case of Public Servants' Mobility Program in Greece**

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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to highlight the opportunities and constraints of transformative learning through the comparative analysis between the horizontal training courses for redundant public servants and the targeted training actions for public servants who move to new posts, implemented in the framework of mobility program in the Greek public sector.

### **Introduction**

The crisis has been the catalyst for the necessary adaptation of the Greek public administration. Several reforms have been initiated in order to adopt a coherent strategy for public administration and e-governance. The aim is to create solid foundation for a compact, flexible and effective public administration to deliver the services that are essential to the economic and social well-being of our society. The strategic management of human resource constitutes one of the fundamental pillars of public administration reform. Towards this end, the creation of an internal job market and a permanent mobility mechanism is envisaged on the basis of job description, meritocratic selection of qualified candidates and transparent process. However, at the beginning of the reconstruction process, some difficult decisions had to be implemented in order to handle the mobility of redundant personnel, as the result of negotiations with of the Troika (ECB, Commission and IMF) under the First and the Second Economic Adjustment Programmes, agreed in May 2010 and in March 2012 respectively. According these decisions, it was provided that 25.000 public servants should have been included in the mobility program during the period from September 2013 to March 2014 following the Law 4172/2013 in order to ensure the better allocation of human resources.

These events leading to involuntary changes in the employment status of public servants or to professional transitions to other posts or fields can stimulate perspective transformation according to transformative learning theory. But, can individuals be open to engage in transformative learning under any circumstances or social conditions? What affect individuals' willingness to engage in the process of revising perspectives? Is it a more concrete vision of the future or clearer employment perspectives that can motivate people to engage in transformative learning activities? What are the opportunities and constraints of transformative learning in the case of change jobs and entire career paths? Can transformative learning contribute to change management? These are some of the questions that will be examined through the comparative analysis between the horizontal training courses for redundant public servants and the targeted training actions for public servants who move to new posts, implemented in the framework of mobility program in the Greek public sector, with the view to strengthen the opportunities for professional and personal development to enable them to respond quickly to new tasks and to effectively integrate in the new working environment.

### **Transformative Learning and Social Change**

Transformative learning theory constitutes one of the most generative ideas and continues to be a growing area of study of adult education (Taylor, 2008; Dirkx, 2011). Also in Greece, transformative learning theory became the reference point for adult educators who adopt emancipatory learning goals (Kokkos, 2012).

According to transformative learning, perspective transformation occurs either through a series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes or as a result of an acute personal or social crisis, for example, divorce, accident, war, job loss, or retirement (Taylor, 2008). However, events that precipitate transformative learning are often traumatic, such as the loss or the change of a job, and can make the path for getting the positive outcomes of transformative learning painful (Taylor, Cranton, 2013). On the other hand, individuals cannot be forced to transform and they need to be open and willing to engage in the process of revising perspectives (Taylor, Cranton, 2013). What brings learners to be open to engage in transformative learning? Can flexibility of educational opportunities in response to the changing needs of adult learners (Schmidt, 2013) and vision of different future give people a great incentive to engage in transformative learning activities and take action (Miao, 2000)? An important question posed by Taylor and Cranton (2013) is whether the desire of people to revise perspectives is a characteristic of the person or a characteristic of the event (p. 41, 43). In this, Habermas and Mezirow think that emancipatory human interests are those that lead people to want to be free from constraints, while according to Mezirow the goal of adult education is to help adults towards liberalization, social responsibility and autonomous learning (Taylor, Cranton, 2013, p. 40-41).

Transformative learning theory is understood as “*the learning process of construction a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action*” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). In other words, it is the process that an individual evokes to monitor the nature of problems and the value of alternative solutions (Kitchenham, 2008). The key concepts in transformative learning consist on experience, critical reflection and development. The ability to think critically is necessary in order to result in transformation and it is itself developmental (Segers, De Greef, 2011). Therefore, the central element of perspective transformation is critical self-reflection and can be painful as it involves a comprehensive and critical re-evaluation of oneself (Kitchenham, 2008). Thinking autonomously is essential for full citizenship in democracy and for moral decision making in situations of rapid change (Mezirow, 1997).

However, one of the factors that is neglected in Mezirow's theory of transformation is the role of context and social change in the transformative experience (Taylor, 2008). According to Freire, conscientization can help individuals to perceive social, political and economic contradictions and to develop critical consciousness in order to take action and transform reality (Kitchenham, 2008). The *social-emancipatory view* adopted by Freire focuses on social transformation (Taylor, 2008, p. 8). Conscientization is depicted as a collective activity, in which learners examine their common condition (Newman, 2012). But, transformation is not an automatic process as according to Freire consciousness growth is gradual; the individuals begin with “intransitive thought” that their actions cannot change their conditions, then pass to some semi transitive thought and action for change and finally reach critical transitivity and decide to take action for change (Kitchenham, 2008).

The main difference identified here is that of personal or emancipatory transformation as well as of individual or social change. On this point, Taylor (2008) argues “*Where the individual and society are seen as one and the same... .., transformative learning*

*is as much about social change as individual transformation*” (p. 10). Nevertheless, social conditions can affect the willingness to perspective transformation (Tennant, 1993) and large societal changes can stimulate critical reflection although do not necessarily lead to individual transformation (Segers, De Greef, 2011). This reciprocal process of the sociocultural setting and personal change is in any case an important dimension that should be included in the future research on transformative experiences (Taylor, Cranton, 2013).

Characteristic examples of this reciprocal process constitute the professional transitions to other fields that require considerable identity shifts (Snyder, 2011). According to the findings of the qualitative case study of Snyder (2011) on the transition made by three career-changing women moving from science and engineering fields into secondary teaching, the participants underwent perspective transformations in their thinking about themselves as professionals and their philosophy of teaching despite the high levels of fear, anxiety and shame in response to new learning. This research reveals that it is not an easy transition to move from any professional career into secondary education, as the transition from a familiar environment and a field with clear goals to a new unpredictable environment is destabilising. This difficulty of professional transition to other field exists even if the participants' career change is voluntary and had to do with their desire to make a difference.

On the other hand, Newman (2012) suggests to abandon the term *transformative learning* and adopt the straightforward term *good learning*, as change is included in all definitions of learning and it is anticipated from well-resourced and competently delivered programs. Precisely, Newman suggests that a program that succeeds in encouraging participants to affirm their identity and take control of their own learning through individual and collective experience is simply good learning. Based on the examples of two friends, one attending a transformative workshop without the expected results and the one entering a university program to become botanist resulting in changing her status, Newman (2012) argues that *“For a young worker, the most significant training may well be the specialist skill of welding aluminum (ask any welder), because that skill will secure the worker a lifetime career in a specialist shipyard.”* (p. 52).

Nevertheless, the need of a new learning culture is particularly highlighted and it is argued that transformative learning is a relevant theory to help understand learning in the workplace and can support the development of a learning organization. Despite learning disabilities due to the current hierarchical organizational structures and the way that people's jobs are defined, transformational learning can be supported with the emphasis in adult education on developing critical thinkers, facilitating self-directed learning and emphasizing the role of the educator in stimulating critical self-reflection (Segers, De Greef, 2011). Transformative learning theory that stimulates critical reflection and autonomous thinking may contribute to management education development, encouraging more collaborative, responsible, and ethical ways to manage organisations (Closs and Antonello, 2011). In particular, management education should provoke transformation of the thinking mode towards critical knowledge and critical reflectivity, as organisations affect the life of the majority of the population in the world and managerial responsibility on environment and social changes is vital. Despite the problems related to the corporate conservative reaction to change and the individual career ambitions, transformational change in organisations' structures and transformative learning for individual change can ensure the continuity of organisations in a long-term projection (Closs and Antonello, 2011).

### **Training in the framework of public servants' mobility programme**

One of the fundamental pillars of the Greek Strategy for Administration Reform (2014) is the strategic management and better allocation of human resource to ensure the effective and efficient functioning of the public sector. Towards this end, the creation of an internal job market and a permanent mobility mechanism is envisaged so that changing posts will become a natural and transparent process, based on the meritocratic selection of qualified candidates and the use of the job description. Training capabilities will be developed to foster the personal development of employees and to align the workforce to the needs of the administration.

However, at the beginning of the reconstruction process, a mobility program had to be implemented following the Law 4172/2013 in order to handle the mobility of redundant personnel and address better the needs of public sector entities. The reallocation process for employees has to be done on the basis of the staffing plans and the needs expressed by each ministry. According the Law 4172/2013, employees placed in the mobility program have their wages cut to 75% and they need to find a new position in the 8 months following their placement. Otherwise, the employees that don't find a new position will exit the public sector. The implementation of the mobility program is supported by specific training programs aiming to enhance the knowledge and the competences of the employees in the mobility scheme in order to enable them to respond quickly to new tasks and to effectively integrate in the new working environment.

There are two categories of training programs: (a) the horizontal training courses for redundant public servants who search new jobs and (b) the targeted training actions for public servants who move to new posts. In the first category of training programs, there are included short training courses on basic key competences, such as the use of information technologies in public services, communication and citizens services. In the second category of training programs there are foreseen targeted training actions in response to the specific needs of the ministries.

It's worth mentioning that the role of the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government in the education and continuous training of public servants for the implementation of reforms is predominant. The National Centre for Public Administration should be able to meet the needs for well trained personnel for critical administrative and executive positions. The Centre should ensure in practice that public servants acquire strong sense of mission and commitment for the modernization and the reconstruction of the state. This can be realized through targeted actions in the direction of providing tailor made training and education services depending on the strategic needs of ministries and public agencies. Moreover, the skills development at all levels of the professional hierarchy of public authorities, the immediate response to the training needs arising from actual public policies and the integrated educational interventions in public entities are among the actions with which the National Centre contributes to the necessary adaptation to the changes.

Currently, the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government has implemented during 2013 several training programs related to the reorganization of public services and organisations, the redesign of public procedures, the evaluation of public structures and human resource and the implementation of the mobility program (EKDDA, 2014). Regarding specifically the training programs of the mobility program, only the first category of the horizontal training courses for redundant public servants who search new jobs has been implemented. The second category of the targeted training actions for public servants who move to new posts has not started yet

as the reallocation process for employees is in progress.

Therefore, the training programs for redundant public servants who search new jobs have been implemented since October 2013 to May 2014 and concern the following topics:

- 1) Digital governance and services to citizens (duration of 14 hours)
- 2) Basic principles of administrative action (duration of 21 hours)
- 3) Development of personal skills (duration of 21 hours)

### **Method**

The aim of this research is to identify the opportunities and constraints of transformative learning in the case of change jobs and entire career paths, as well as to find some answers on whether individuals are open to engage in transformative learning under any circumstances or social conditions and if a more concrete vision of the future or clearer employment perspectives can motivate people to engage in transformative learning activities. In fact, this research aims to understand if the employees of the mobility program participating in the training programs who are losing their job are less willing to engage in the process of revising perspectives than the employees who are changing posts and have clearer employment perspectives.

Taking into consideration that the difficulty of the mobility program's implementation and the related negative conjuncture could not permit the conduction of interviews to redundant employees, the only method that could be selected was the analysis of the data received from the evaluation questionnaire that the participants in the first category of training programs have filled. The evaluation questionnaire is filled electronically and it is structured in separated units concerning the evaluation of the program utility, the evaluation of trainers, the evaluation of educational and organizational parameters, the fulfillment of thematic units and the global evaluation of the program, from which a general indicator of satisfaction is inferred. So, from the evaluation data received from the National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government in relation to the training programs for redundant public servants who search new jobs, two dimensions are mainly highlighted: the evaluation grade of educational and organisational parameters and the degree of satisfaction from the program.

Normally, these data could be compared with the evaluation data of the targeted training actions for public servants who move to new posts in order to acquire on the basis of the comparative analysis more convincing evidence on their willingness to undergo transformations. Unfortunately, the second category of the targeted training actions has not started yet as the reallocation process for employees is in progress. As result, our analysis will focus on the evaluation data of the horizontal training courses for redundant public servants who search new jobs, while we can have some general expectations that are encouraged by the positive evaluation data of the training programs related to the reorganization of structures and procedures and the implementation of actual public policies.

### **Results**

The National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government has implemented 102 horizontal training courses in total for 1.808 redundant public servants who search new jobs between October 2013 and May 2014.

Table 1. Number of participants by topic of training programs and year of implementation

<b>Topic of training programs</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Total of participants</b>
Development of personal skills	20	13	33	565
Basic principles of administrative action	19	18	37	705
Digital governance and services to citizens	26	6	32	538
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>1808</b>

*Source:* National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government. May 2014.

Most of participants are concentrated on the topic related to basic principles of administrative action. The rest of the participants are evenly distributed between the topics related to the development of personal skills and digital governance.

From the 1.808 participants in the training programs, only 59% of the participants (1.067 participants) have filled the questionnaire and evaluated the training program they have attended.

Table 2. Number and percentage of participants who evaluated the training programs

<b>Topic of training programs</b>	<b>Total of participants</b>	<b>Percentage of participants</b>
Development of personal skills	322	57%
Basic principles of administrative action	444	63%
Digital governance and services to citizens	301	56%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1067</b>	<b>59%</b>

*Source:* National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government. May 2014.

The high rate of participants that did not filled the evaluation questionnaires and did not want to evaluate the training programs provides a clear indication of their disappointment and negative reaction, which is reasonable and can be explained by their difficult situation. From this indication, it can be concluded that they are not willing at this stage to engage in the process of transformative training.



Table 3. Evaluation data of the training programs

Topic of training programs	Evaluation average of educational/organisational parameters	Total degree of satisfaction
Development of personal skills	8,48	8,5 (excellent)
Basic principles of administrative action	8,68	8,86 (excellent)
Digital governance and services to citizens	8,78	8.81 (excellent)

*Source:* National Centre for Public Administration and Local Government. May 2014.

The very high degree of satisfaction of the 59% of the participants, who evaluated the training program they have attended, provides sufficient evidence that they are willing to engage in the process of revising perspectives. Although data do not allow for more in depth insights, the high degree of satisfaction even from the half of participants is very encouraging in this particular circumstance.

Furthermore, the evaluation data of the targeted training actions for public servants who move to new posts are expected to be positive due to clearer employment perspectives. These expectations are inferred inductively from the high degree of satisfaction, which is recorded in the evaluation data of training programs that support public policies' reforms, such as public procurement, dealing with fraud, financial control, and customs management audits.

### **Discussion**

Traumatic social or personal events cannot always stimulate perspective transformation according to transformative learning theory. Individuals cannot be open to engage in transformative learning under any circumstances or social conditions. The characteristics of the persons, the nature of the events and the social conditions are significant factors that affect individuals' willingness to undergo transformations. The worse working conditions, the negative social repercussions and the lack of clear future perspectives can constitute some of the constraints of transformative learning especially in time of crisis. Even with clearer employment perspectives, professional transitions to other posts or fields are not easy and can create fear and anxiety in response to new learning. Despite the arguments in favor of specific and competently delivered training programs, transformative learning provides many opportunities in situation of rapid change by stimulating critical reflection and autonomous thinking on problems and alternative solutions. Transformative learning can also support the development of a learning organisation and encourage more collaborative, responsible and ethical ways to manage organisations. Transformative learning can contribute to change management and ensure the personal and social well-being as well as the continuity of organisations

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**Creating opportunities for individual and collective empowerment:  
Challenges from the macro to the micro**

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**Abstract**

This paper was intended to explore, via a case study, the developing relationship between three adult educational providers seeking to establish a Foundation Degree in Community Engagement at a university in the South Eastern region of the UK. The long-standing illness of one key stakeholder has postponed the process; but provided the authors with the opportunity of reviewing transformative learning and education at macro, meso and micro levels.

**Introduction**

Three educational providers, comprising one HE institution, The Workers' Educational Association –a long-standing educational charity - and one local government supported organisation, had come together in the hope that they might transcend their institutional boundaries, attitudes and discourses with the intention of facilitating 'emancipatory educational outcomes.' Committed to learning as a process for 'surviving, critiquing and creating' (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 8) we were all highly conscious of the dynamics involved in working together at the pre-engagement stage before encountering potential students; and that our collective efforts would, of necessity, be multi-layered and reflective of the following stages:

- a) The macro-level – including organisational cultures, histories, discourse and legacies.
- b) The meso-level – including the problematics of design, ownership and inclusion.
- c) The micro-level – providing congruence and coherence for the individual learner.

Each of these layers is also underpinned by a shared desire for the potential for collective as well as individual change, and we were informed by the work of Honneth, in relation to his acknowledgement of the centrality of respect and recognition (2007), and also by Brookfield's ideas around critical pragmatism (2005), in order to explore the challenges inherent in striving for a shared value-base, at both meso and micro levels, whilst remaining within the necessary limits and constraints imposed at the macro.

The project's postponement led to the current authors' dilemma: what were we to present at Conference when our proposal was no longer appropriate? After much discussion, it became clear to us that the three levels noted above still warranted examination, albeit under a different lens; the fact that the project was postponed did not mean that we need not address such fundamental questions pertaining to the potential for transformative learning and education, and the distinctions between the two. But there was a further dilemma: what were we each bringing to the discussion in terms of our own understandings of these terms; and to what extent might we assume shared or largely variant positions in relation to them? The paper that follows articulates our discussion.



our separate and diverse understandings stemmed from our own auto/biographical *formations* (or *bildungs*) and that it was necessary to pay attention to these if we were to move towards closer elucidation of both the term and its pedagogic potential. Bearing in mind the micro, meso and macro levels of analysis that were supposed to underpin our proposed Foundation Degree, we were also mindful of the need to tease out the relationships, complexities and ambiguities (at least for our own benefits), between individual transformative *learning*, and *education* and assumptions about translation into social change within a purposive social and political educational agenda. In this increasing spiral of questing and complexity, we need also remain mindful of the nature of any social change that we might see as desirable outcome.

We now turn to our own experiences and definitions of transformative learning, and of the pedagogic trajectories that have resulted. We thereby hope to illustrate our own meaning-making across the three levels noted above: Holstein and Gubrium, (2000, p.106) remind us, 'As texts of experience, personal stories are not complete before their telling, but are assembled in relation to interpretive needs'. For this, and related reasons, we shall each tell our story in the first person.

### **Wilma's story**

In a forthcoming chapter, "Moments of Being' and the search for meaning: epistemological and methodological challenges for the autoethnographic researcher' (Fraser, 2014), I explore the impact, the life-changing consequences, that a 'moment of being', an epiphany, had for me as a 17 year old schoolgirl. (The third person is used in the telling of the tale):

*It was a moment like any other...and yet...She began to feel the weight of the fountain pen in her hand. She looked at, and saw, the marbled mosaic of the plastic casing, knew the strength and liquidity of the blue/black ink held within; a drop poised on the nib waiting to join the cursive script filling the space between those immaculate lines on the creamy/white paper. She saw and felt each finger and thumb as if newly sculpted, and for one sole purpose, to balance the weight of the pen. She heard her breathing slow to the metronome conducted by Bach, she became her breathing. No, she became the music and, as it filled the room, she was lost to the room, yet not lost in the room, rather found in the dissolving walls of the room, the room, too, lost to the street below. And the street both lost and found in the city; this city, her home and yet not her home, for her home, her place, her time were all dissolving and merging with others' homes, places and times. Chronos was defeated: this moment was all and it was filled with grace... Gradually, self-consciousness returned and, with it, the shapes and frames of books and pictures, of table and chairs; of her friend still caught in text and linearity. It was a homecoming to be sure, yet she had returned from Home, and with an assurance that behind time's beat there lay a perpetual present, and it was benign...*

In the same chapter, I went on to explain that I was,

so utterly transformed by her experience that she selected, and pursued, as many pathways as possible that might lead to further transportations. Or, at the least, to encounters with others who could validate that 'moment' and the astonishing simultaneity of its utter strangeness and its profound familiarity.

My pursuit continued throughout my undergraduate and early postgraduate studies; and I found, via those studies, others such as Coleridge, Wordsworth, Woolf and T.S Eliot (1969) who might afford that validation; and reassurance that such 'transformation' was legitimate in the sense that it was shared. C.S Lewis (1955/2008, p. 16) describes a similar moment in these words:

It (was) difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden ...comes somewhere near it...It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.

The relevance to this paper is the impact that such an epiphany had, and continues to have on this writer over 40 years later. This was truly transformative, but what of the constituent parts of this experience? How might understanding of them further our discussion? And how might we extricate elements related to any distinction between transformative learning and education?

The elements worth noting include the fact that this 'moment', I describe as a 'moment of grace', came unbidden to the 17 year old who just happened to be doing her homework at the time of this 'visitation'. The language is key; I talk of my experience in transcendent terms: this was a transformation that came from some 'external' source; it was an experience that 'proved' the existence of a 'greater force', 'unifying consciousness'; call it what you will, it marked my *lifeworld* from that time to this...And it led to my pursuing educative endeavours that would further my understanding of that 'moment' via the writings and artworks of others. I noted (ibid), 'the astonishing simultaneity of its utter strangeness and its profound familiarity', and this illustrates a further element in my understanding of the nature of this 'transformation'; at some level I recognised the 'truth' of my experience. This reminds me of the Greek term, *anagnorisis*, which Aristotle used in his Poetics to 'describe the moment of tragic recognition in which the protagonist realizes some important fact or insight, especially a truth about himself, human nature, or his situation' ([http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit\\_terms\\_T.html](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_T.html)). I am not suggesting that we retain the element of tragedy in this appropriation of the term, but I do feel that *anagnorisis* offers another way of articulating that sense of the transformative which can be validating in a sudden, or gradually acquired insight into, a deeper 'recognition' of, the nature of things.

This is not the space in which to engage in analysis of this 'moment' as possible psychological projection, neural imbalance, or visitation of the divine; the key points for consideration are the unbidden nature of this 'critical incident', and *thence* the learning that ensued, in incremental and deepening spirals of understanding, via the pursuit of educative pathways that would foster the same. Of course, there were gaps and false starts; and in recent times the closure of many pedagogic spaces where such encounters might be had, but that initial transformation led to the *formation*, the *bildung*, of my *lifeworld* which is still in a state of becoming ...'Always write out of those spaces and experiences that carry the sting of memory, those epiphanies, and turning point moments that leave a mark on you' (Denzin, 2012).

Thus far, I have concentrated on the *micro* in terms of my individual predilections concerning 'transformative' learning and education. The initial impetus for my pursuit of what I would now term transformative educative and learning experiences was not bound by any form of pedagogic intervention, although I would always classify that 'moment' as a truly transformative learning experience. The further challenges, relating to translating that learning into deeper understanding of the meso and the macro, will also involve the players in the original proposal to design and deliver a particular educational programme. What might be noted at this point is the link between my *lifeworld* as described here and my comprehension of the 'organisational cultures, histories, discourse and legacies' which frame the macro level of our project. Obviously, detailed exegesis of 30 years' involvement in adult education, and the tone

and tenor of that involvement, is not appropriate in this paper. However, it is worth noting, perhaps, that the 'critical incident' described above; the 'moment of being' that had such transformative impact, retains its legacy in shaping my comprehension of those 'cultures, histories, discourse and legacies' which frame our endeavour.

Given a predilection for seeing the world as part of a larger pattern, and of the inhabitants of that world as linked to that pattern, it is hardly surprising that I should strive to structure my pedagogic practices, both personal and professional, within frames of reference that chime with that predilection. I take it as axiomatic that the web that binds us requires careful nurturing or we shall tear at the very fabric that holds our pattern together. I therefore share the kinds of anxieties expressed by Collins, Hughes and Samuels (2012, p. 165) who state that, 'The political one-dimensionality which underpins our administered lives is a reflection of our compromised relationship to a greater multi-dimensional representation of reality.' And I concur with calls for a revisioned educative endeavour which 'will need to address those collective processes that have been split-off; for example, how will humanity redress the damage done to the world and to each other (ibid, p. 167)?' I would hope that our modest project, our Foundation Degree in Community Engagement, would involve serious attention to the broadest definition of community that we can muster, and that we would play our part in responding to the question that Collins, Hughes and Samuels pose (ibid, p.170): '[H]ow can transformation – from a superficial existence, to a greater depth of living – be considered at a collective level? This is probably the most compelling question that confronts humanity today.'

### **Rebecca's story**

I have not been aware of any epiphanies through formal learning or studying. Pauses for thought there have certainly been, and various times when it felt as though connections were being made that were helpful for my own enhanced understanding. This speaks of a more cognitive acknowledgement and development. According to Brookfield (2005), learning can only be considered transformative if it involves a fundamental questioning or reordering of how one thinks or acts. My own learning progress has been more gradual and often results from discussions allowing reflection and encouraging reflexivity. Does this constitute transformation? Over time I have certainly developed with experience, through the emerging of passionate interests and slow growth in my capacity to absorb, understand and theorise, but no epiphanies have been experienced by this particular student. I am an adult learner in education currently and have been engaged in some formal learning programme several times over the last thirty years. Each experience has changed me and facilitated stronger connections and the capacity for deeper understanding. Brookfield draws attention to Mezirow's positing of a developmental trajectory of adult meaning-making as people encompass broad frames of reference: "that are increasingly comprehensive and discriminating" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 5).

A different point of access, and a new lens through which to see, for me, was the introduction of artistic methods as an alternative way of looking at questions. Collage was a fun and unusual way of framing concepts through visual representation which I both enjoyed and find resonates with me still, long after the class has finished. Brookfield discusses Marcuse's views on art's revolutionary potential:

Marcuse is careful to recognise that "art cannot change the world" ... though he does believe that "it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world". ... What art does offer us, however, is a chance of breaking with the familiar, of inducing in us an awareness of other ways of being in the world (Brookfield, 2005, p. 202).



I do see the transforming of my students and clients before my eyes. I teach students from non-traditional backgrounds who, nearing the culmination of their degree programmes, clearly articulate the changes they perceive in themselves. Generally older, with low incomes, often from ethnic minorities, many experience a considerable struggle to remain as students (West, 1996). Faced with a steep uphill climb of returning to part-time study after many years, they also have the emotional legacy of their previous history of educational failure, or at least, lack of success, to combat (Chapman Houlst, 2012). On a programme with reflective activities and group discussions central to the experience, these students describe their own transformative experience by the time of their third full-time year. They talk of seeing things differently; of being able to connect the theory to their work; and feeling they can make sense of, and improve their practice in, their professional arena, now they are familiar with the necessary underpinning knowledge (Merill and West, 2009). It is interesting to note the more embodied elements of their reports: feelings are noted and even what they 'see', seems to have changed (Corfield, 2014).

I also work as a careers counsellor, working with individuals who are facing a career crisis, redundancy or who just want help to get a new job. The demoralised and dispirited client comes to see me, we work together to look at her past history acknowledging achievements and highlighting development, we play around with and discuss the possible future options and a way forward emerges. Using active listening, exhibiting positive regard and generating explicit recognition, the client leaves - upbeat, confident and positively charged-up (Egan, 1993). Honneth identifies three forms of social recognition necessary to develop a satisfying identity, the first is love or friendship and the second is a rights-based recognition as a member of society. This career counselling work seems to fall more into Honneth's third category of social recognition through: "the social esteem of individual achievements and abilities" (Honneth, 2007, p. 74). My clients come from a stuck or disenfranchised position, with a desire for an agenda for change. They want their lives, life chances, life-worlds to be transformed. Clients frequently say they feel so much better than when they arrived, they speak of being invigorated and renewed. A considerable part of this transformation arises from their hearing a summary of their life story, through my reflecting back to them, and therefore recognising, their own progress, development and achievements.

Some work is more explicitly aimed at transformation. In interrogating my own autobiography, I can see I partly inherited my desire for fairness and social justice from my parents. They spent their lives fostering opportunities for working people to learn and participate fully in society. When my father was the Principal of a Workers' Education College in the 1970s, I saw and admired their sense of purpose as well as the results they inculcated. This influence upon me showed itself in the training I later carried out with working adults at the micro level.

I spent many years training trades union activists to 'take the floor' and to speak in public. Unlike Demosthenes or Cicero in Ancient Greece, these students were not versed in oratory or skilled at captivating a crowd. Often without any post-compulsory education at all, public speaking was their greatest fear and yet they needed to be able to stand at the podium and plead or argue convincingly for the cause of social transformation. They needed skills and confidence to operate at the meso level relevant to them, whether at a national conference, or to promulgate campaigns for higher wages and better conditions in the workplace or to defend their members assertively at an employment tribunal. A combination of techniques, group analysis and support, together with recognition and encouragement from the tutor, produced

radical transformations over two days. Testament from previous students told of changes that stayed with them, that they felt took them to a new level of confidence and presentation. They could exhibit a different persona at the podium. Persona in Ancient Greek meant a mask or disguise and often, in order feel able to represent other people or to plead the cause of others, my students found the idea of adopting a new persona, or putting on a performance, very helpful. Goffman thought that all human activity was a performance. He cites Robert Park:

It is probably no mere historical accident that the word person, in its first meaning, is a mask. It is rather a recognition of the fact that everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role. ... It is in these roles that we know each other; it is in these roles that we know ourselves (Park, 1950, cited in Goffman, 1959, p 30).

### **Conclusions**

This paper and its preparation have given us the opportunity of reviewing transformative learning and education and its meaning for us as individuals. We end with many unanswered questions. Who judges the degree of transformation? If we self-report it has happened, does that make it so? Has it happened if we see others becoming more involved in the changing of society? Is there a difference between doing and being? Does this then mean that all learning is transformative? How would we delineate this gradual transformation or becoming, from more dramatic epiphanies of understanding?

We have conceived a programme for disadvantaged learners that requires us to reflect on and plan for its success at macro, meso and micro levels. In order to get validated through established institutions will have to demonstrate that it gives potential for greater employability. We also want it to offer scope for the broadening of horizons for the individual at the micro level, for the liberty and thrill of learning for its own sake. At the meso level we will need all partners in the design process to feel that they are equal investors with the potential for successful outcomes in their own terms, and we aim for an increased awareness of the possibilities for increased social justice through the study and future of community engagement at the macro level. Students may feel transformed by the end of such a programme, they may alternatively feel that they have experienced a gradual emerging into a new way of doing, being, thinking, feeling and appearing to others. To remain true to the educational experiences, collective knowledge and beliefs of all the educational providers in this initiative to start a new Foundation degree, we will be determined to foster notions of transformative learning to facilitate personal and collective changes.

Mills tells us of the sociological imagination:

The first fruit of this imagination ... is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period., that he can know his own chances in life only by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances. In many ways it is a terrible lesson; in many ways a magnificent one (Mills, 1959/2000, p. 5).

We believe the term transformative learning to be highly relevant. Transforming we would argue, can happen in a myriad of ways. For some it may be epiphanic, a moment of revelation and insight; for some it may happen in a more episodic fashion at different times with particular teachers or groups of learners. For others it may be more gradual and evolving. We will keep exploring and delving into the views and discourses around the concept of education as a road to transformation in order to do justice to the stories, hopes and prospects of our future students.

Only connect! ... Live in fragments no longer (Forster, 1910, p. 188).

[\* Wordle is a toy for generating 'word clouds' from a specified text. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text.]

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## Moving from Awareness to Action: Processes of Change through Transformative Social Justice Education

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### Abstract

This paper discusses phases of change and key process factors identified in a seminar on structural inequality and diversity, integrating theory with personal reflection, dialogue, and action. The phases of change are: *emotional engagement; overt and covert resistance; emerging systemic awareness; inquiry, action and deeper learning; and integration and agency.*

### Introduction

For the past ten years, we have been teaching together in a doctoral specialization in Transformative Learning for Social Justice (TLSJ) at Fielding Graduate University in California. The purpose of the specialization is:

*to explore the relationship between transformative learning and social change for social justice by deepening the understanding of the connections between personal transformation and societal transformation; creating new knowledge that challenges and builds on existing knowledge and ways of knowing; designing teaching and learning content and methods rooted in Freirean, critical, and feminist pedagogies; conducting research on relevant topics and using methodologies that empower both researchers and participants; and linking practice with theory to strengthen scholarly practice. (FGU, 2014)*

With this broad sense of purpose about “what transformative learning is for,” we have been involved in an ongoing research project exploring the impact and transformation process resulting from a particular seminar within this specialization titled “Structural Inequality and Diversity”, that blends on-line dialogue with face to face introductory and concluding meetings, and integrates theory with personal reflection and action. The intended learning outcomes for the course include an awareness of how various forms of oppression and inequality function at personal, cultural, and institutional levels; student development of their own identities and sense of agency in relation to these forms of oppression; and the identification of steps they can take to work for social justice in their own lives. The approach used in the seminar integrates principles drawn from Freirian education for critical consciousness (Freire, 1998), social justice education (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007), transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000); intergroup dialogue across difference (Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Wasserman & Gallegos, 2009) and the development of intercultural competence (Landis, Bennett, & Bennett, 2003).

Through this project, we have been developing a model of the transformative learning process that our students appear to experience. This ongoing research has identified clear increases in critical consciousness and agency, and five phases of change that students experienced: *emotional engagement, overt and covert resistance, emerging*

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*systemic awareness, inquiry and deeper learning, and integration and agency* (Gallegos and Schapiro, 2008, 2009). In this paper, we describe this five phase process and its relationship to the course design and facilitation.

Teaching in a distributed learning environment, in which virtual interaction is supplemented by periodic face to face meetings, we have noticed the potential as well as the challenges of doing social justice education in this setting. Somewhat surprisingly for us, this work appears to lead to learning and transformation that are sometimes deeper than what we have seen in traditional classroom environments.

The learning and change that students have been experiencing are reflected in their own words, expressed well through metaphors explaining how their views of the world and themselves have been transformed.

*It has been a significant step in my personal transformation and has sharpened the focus, brought images into resolution that I've been struggling to examine for quite some time.*

Another said:

*taking this class is like swallowing a strange pill that awakens you to a new reality. I see a little more clearly what the readings refer to as a "matrix of domination." Instances of racism or an incident of prejudice seem easier to see than systems of oppression. What was once hidden has become more obvious.*

And a third:

*I have opened a door and as I pass through the threshold I have changed and the world is different. It's like viewing things with a third dimension when I'm used to only seeing two dimensions. I am no longer completely blind to the systems and structures that prevent people from being whole. This added dimension is ugly to witness and experience but at least I am seeing it and know that it's there.*

We can hear in these words an emerging critical systemic consciousness. This study was designed to help us develop a deeper understanding of the process of "conscientization" through which those changes came about.

This inquiry is situated within three conversations about transformative education for social justice. First of all, we agree with those who maintain that transformative learning in general and learning for social justice in particular must involve the heart as well as the head, the emotions as well as the intellect (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1998; Ellsworth, 1998; Adams, Bell, and Griffin, 2007; Yorks and Kasl, 2006). Most education emphasizes one of these dimensions at the expense of the others. Traditional adult education courses on social justice are usually primarily theory and information based. Non-formal adult education draws on learners' experiences, past and present, both in and out of the group itself, as important resources for learning. Our work attempts to bring together both of these approaches (Schapiro, 2003) and to address the many levels at which oppression operates.

Second, we believe in the potential power of dialogue across difference as a way of opening people's minds and hearts to others' experiences and to developing critical awareness of issues of dominance and subordination related to our various social identities and group memberships. In the growing literature on intergroup dialogue, Naga & Gurin (2007) describe this approach as:

an educational endeavor that brings together students from two or more social identity groups to build relationships across cultural and power differences, to raise consciousness of inequalities, to explore the similarities and differences in experiences across identity groups, and to strengthen individual and collective capacities to promote social justice.(p. 35)

We make use of the three approaches that Nagda and Gurin describe as “critical analysis and understanding of difference and dominance; discursive engagement across differences; and sustained and conjoint community building and conflict engagement. “(p. 36). In our own theory-building in regard to group work and dialogue as contexts for transformation (Schapiro, Wasserman, & Gallegos, 2012), we argue that such group work must engage people on three levels – the intrapersonal, the intergroup, and the systemic - in order to foster the changes in consciousness and identity in which we are interested.

Third, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) ) (Landis, Bennett and Bennett, 2003), which describes movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, has gained wide usage in diversity work, and we value the perspective it offers as a way of conceptualizing how people think about and deal with cultural difference. However, we believe that to use it to address social justice issues, it should be integrated with an understanding of power, social identity, and positionality, which is the approach that we take in our work. In addition to appreciating cultural differences, students must also develop the ability to know where they come from, their structural position in a system of racial/class/gender/etc., privilege and oppression, and why. Only in this way can people integrate “relational empathy”(the ability to know and feel another’s experience) with “structural empathy” (the ability to know and feel AND understand the other’s realities in the context of their own and the other’s engagement in social structures of privilege and oppression).

In our original research project, we asked the following questions: (1) How did participants change in regard to: their sense of *identity* as members of various social identity groups; their *views of various “others”*; their *awareness of the systemic and structural aspects* of inequality; and their sense of *agency* in regard to working for social justice. (2) How did this learning experience lead to those changes? The data, which drew on student papers and archives of on-line dialogues, provided evidence of deep changes in regard to all four areas of change. We focus here on our findings related to the change process that has appeared to result from the course experience, although evidence of some of the outcomes will be clear as we discuss the process of change that people seemed to experience

### **The Internal Process of Change**

In students’ reflection papers and on-line dialogue, we were able to discern the contours of an internal process of change in response to this learning experience. While of course each student’s process was unique, we identified five overlapping phases which most of the students seemed to experience. These phases were not necessarily sequential, nor were they purely cognitive, but involved and seemed in some ways to be driven by the emotions of the experience. In the following section, we will describe the experiences that typify each Phase, followed by select quotations from students, which provide insight into their meaning-making process.

*Phase 1: Emotional engagement.*

For most students, their first exposure to the content of the seminar evoked a range of challenging emotions such as discomfort, pain, dissonance, and confusion. Getting in touch with the emotion in their own stories, the pain in others' stories, and the story-telling process itself brought on these reactions. The intensity continued throughout the seminar as students were asked to relate their personal experience to the readings. As we shifted our lens' focal point from one ism to another, the process was repeated, sometimes considering the impact of class, race, gender and the intersectionality of these dynamics. Depending on where people already were in regard to a particular ism, the impact varied. Along the way, people sometimes challenged and confronted each other, which added to the experience and demonstrated the comfort and trust they felt sharing their different perspectives.

*-My stories didn't come to me quickly. I wasn't used to situating my experiences in this context. Others' stories helped me recall my own and when I finally shared my stories I was surprised by the emotional response I had. Right from the start of this seminar I was jolted into thinking and seeing differently*

*-I'm not sure what I expected. Yet I was surprised by the intensity and the range of emotions I feel about these issues. The subject matter of structural inequality is not something I ever got comfortable with. Perhaps discomfort is a good thing.*

*- At times, I found the experience disturbing, painful, and disorienting as the learning challenged my unexamined acceptance of socialized beliefs."*

*"I suspect that part of what has happened in my personal transformation is due to dealing with the personal and emotional aspects of these issues.*

And so they began the exploration of this difficult and powerful topic.

*Phase 2: Overt and Covert Resistance.*

Many of the participants responded to that pain and discomfort, with some initial resistance by minimizing, becoming defensive, taking things personally or feeling immobilized. From the perspective of the DMIS model, the tendency to minimize the impact of our differences is the transition point between ethnocentrism and ethnorelativity. Remaining engaged in spite of one's inclination to pull back determines the viability of the group process and capacity to engage deeply around these issues. And when the content of these different perspectives involves recognizing the dynamics of oppression and our own role in those dynamics, the impulse to minimize or deny the reality of what we hear is even stronger. From a developmental perspective, resisting the cognitive and emotional dissonance that recognizing others' realities can bring can be a way of maintaining our equilibrium and our identity. As one white male student put it:

*Personally, I have learned that sometimes when I encounter something new that I don't understand it can tap into my stuff, my old tapes. When I perceive something to be directed at me that I don't understand, I can easily interpret that as criticism. Then I tend to feel worthless. At first I allowed the readings to feed into that feeling of being less of a person. Sometimes I interpreted these stories as personal attacks and as criticism. I wanted to defend myself, defend white men, and even stand up for the founding fathers.*

A more subtle form of resistance was experienced by another student who had trouble doing the required writing because of the feelings and confusion it was bringing up

for her – she was immobilized by the pain and confusion. This immobilization reaction seems particularly common when members of disadvantaged groups are reminded of issues and experiences they have intentionally hidden from their own awareness. Excavating those lessons and wounds, this internalized oppression, is often a richly rewarding but carefully navigated process. Students are encouraged to grow and learn in their own preferred styles and present materials to the group in a variety of formats and forums.

*Phase 3: Emerging Systemic Awareness.*

New concepts and cognitive frameworks helped the participants to develop new frames of reference and an emerging systemic awareness. This sort of awareness helped to ward off personal blame and guilt, and also provide frameworks for making meaning of the pain, and take action. Such awareness also led to a new sense of identity in regard to various aspects of their group identities.

*-Each episode of cognitive dissonance compelled me to face unpleasant truths and to construct new beliefs that are aligned with who I am becoming....*

*-This seminar has helped me work to surmount a deeper level of internalized racism than I was aware of. I had recognized the fundamental role it had in distorting my sense of self earlier in life but had not appreciated how much more self-work I needed to do to truly overcome the negative messages that still live within me....*

*-I am no longer completely blind to the systems and structures that prevent people from being whole. This added dimension is ugly to witness and experience but at least I am seeing it and know that it's there.*

*Phase 4: Inquiry, Action and Deeper learning.*

Settling into this awareness of various systems of oppression, students experienced greater openness, vulnerability, ability to ask questions and look for deeper answers, - considering how and when to take the risk to act, and then learning the lessons of praxis. The safe container of the group seemed to help many students move from defensiveness and withdrawal to venture out of their comfort zones. Students had this to say:

*-With practice, and the patience and support of many others, I have developed a willingness to accept a level of vulnerability without feeling weak; I've been willing to engage in efforts with personal risk without fearing a loss of acceptance by my colleagues. A commitment has emerged in me that will not be easily extinguished.*

*-But I don't see [being defensive] as a helpful conversation. I have not been accused or attacked, rather the opposite. This forum was safe place to be vulnerable, to explore and question. Over the course of our conversations, I was able to put those feelings aside. Now, rather than hearing an attack, I hear a sharing of experience; rather than hearing criticism, I hear these stories as new vital information.*

A subtle shift is exemplified by the above quotations, one in which students are able to recognize the limitations of their own personal narratives and reactions and acknowledge the larger systemic factors that create experiences of disadvantage for some and privilege for others. Broadening their perspectives in this manner is one element of critical consciousness and allows deeper reflection on how oppression



operates systematically and often beyond personal awareness.

Others talked about what they learned through the risks of taking action. One said:

*-How do you “name the elephant” without creating an even greater chasm than already exists? This is not just an operational question, it becomes a moral and ethical one as well both in doing something and in doing nothing. And, there are no guide books for when, where, how, or exactly with whom to begin a discussion...actually stepping into the world with those concepts in mind and trying to gently – but not too gently – nudge change into action is an entirely different and much more personally challenging experience.*

*Phase 5: Integration and agency.*

Moving through the pain and discomfort to new levels of understanding and awareness seemed to help students move from despair to hopefulness through identifying possible ways of taking action. As people shifted from having a protective shield, to letting the feelings in, there seemed to be a need to act in order to somehow resolve or assuage those dissonant emotions.

*-This experience...has somehow eased the burden of anxiety fueled by a sense of shame, helplessness and self-righteousness. I've begun to feel that we have a fair shot at societal transformation, the current tone of cultural rhetoric notwithstanding.*

*-Each day I've come to realize that social justice is practiced at macro and micro levels and all points in between... I feel a sense of hope and freedom that was not present earlier.*

Having identified possible courses of action, most of the students ended the experience with a commitment to being a change agent and/or an ally.

*Taking a stand against the persistence of isms takes courage and understanding, and it requires empathy and knowledge. More importantly, it takes an ability to see. One must be able to see the systems of inequality, the oppression, the isms, the hurt, the damage, and the hope for something better. And, one must be willing to act because an ability to see is only half the battle. Action requires speaking up, examining oneself, learning from others, and advocating for change.*

*As I work towards developing a liberatory consciousness, I am interested in collaborating with allies and creating new and lasting alliances against these systems of inequality. I am also committed to supporting others in their journeys to examine and come to terms with our conditioning into oppression, and to help move one another into new identities not based on domination, or on subordination.*

### **The Structure, Process, and Pedagogy of the Seminar**

The course design leads people through a sequential process of focus on multiple levels of system, starting with personal reflection on experience, and building interpersonal community and shared purpose. Our design then gradually moves students through the various “isms”, emphasizing the depth and breadth and interrelatedness of these systems of oppression. Our goal is to complicate and expand their thinking, thereby shifting their habits of mind. Creating cognitive and emotional dissonance and disorienting dilemmas, our work invariably leads participants to

confront their previous frameworks and question assumptions. We found many examples of students passing through the crucible of critical consciousness, as expressed in the quotations above, usually involving emotional vulnerability and reframing. The support of the learning group is often a safe incubator to raise these questions and gain multiple perspectives in a vibrant learning community. The time invested early on to establish the container is critical and creates a valuable safety net when the group faces difficult issues or conversations.

In some of our iterations of the seminar, the goal of challenging minimization and engaging in deeper dialogue was supported by our use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), which was developed by Landis et al (2003) as a way to assess people's level of intercultural competence, as noted above. In individual meetings and group conference calls, we used their scores on the inventory to urge group members to pay greater attention to their thoughts, feelings and behavior when they encounter differences in order to move beyond their collective inclination to emphasize commonalities at the expense of their diversity. This process equipped group members with similar foundational concepts and a model that served them well in moments where taking risks and being authentic were critical to learning.

Student comments and our own observations and reflections helped to identify four key elements of the experience that had a significant impact on the outcomes and internal processes described above.

*Safety and support.* The deep and at times challenging dialogue in which participants engaged, and the risks they took to share their own vulnerabilities and to speak across their differences would not have been possible without a climate of safety, support and trust. From our past experience we knew that creating a safe space to explore these issues would be key. We were challenged by the online environment and intentionally enhanced the virtual portions of the class with face to face meetings and telephone calls. As we have experimented with different combinations of face to face interactions, asynchronous on-line conversation, and videoconferencing, we have concluded that face to face contact at the start is critical.

Those groups that started with an intensive face to face experience allowed them to set norms for themselves and build connection. This seemed essential to their later ability to take risks, engage and care about each other.

*Personal stories.* The initial feelings of discomfort and distress described in the first phase of the process were often brought up by getting in touch with the pain and confusion in one's own and others' stories, both from those in the group and from the personal narratives in the reading. As one student said:

*I haven't stopped thinking about how we can be in places of dominance and subordination depending upon the situation. This was such a significant starting point because it seemed to create a platform for us to talk about power and privilege based on our own stories... We learned to hear others' stories as a first step to understand.*

The use of dialogic story-telling has been a critical component of our work. There is a way in which the stories get to the underlying emotions more directly than when analysis and cognition are relied upon exclusively. It is difficult to avoid growing in empathy when one is exposed to the life experiences of people directly affected by the isms – not ancient history but “in my life, today, right now”. This empathy needs to

include personal concern for the well-being of others but also systemic empathy that incorporates larger structural forces into the analysis and helps explain the persistence and power of oppression as it operates in society.

*The nature of the on-line dialogue:* The on-line environment, in which most of the course interaction took place through asynchronous postings, appeared to contribute to the depth and intensity of the conversations. Significant factors included: the potential safety and flexibility of being able to engage at one's own pace in the safety of one's own space; the ability to take time to reflect between responses, which also seemed to minimize defensiveness; and the freedom to confront one another without having to say something to someone's face, enabling people to take more risks. The asynchronicity and time for reflection also seemed to mitigate the tendency for people to take sides in a conflict. Within this environment, we as facilitators were free to choose when and how we wanted to engage in response to the needs of the group, intervening, clarifying, challenging and modeling our own learning. These attributes of on-line dialogue seem to be particularly valuable for multi-issue social justice education. In later iterations of the seminar, students pointed as well to the impact of our use of the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) as an impetus for them to intentionally stay focused on their differences as a catalyst for deeper learning and dialogue.

*Providing new conceptual frameworks and models.* As evidenced in many of the quotes above, the participants used new models and frameworks about the nature of oppression to make meaning of their experience, to relieve the cognitive and emotional dissonance that arose and reach a new equilibrium. Traditional graduate education usually provides only this cognitive dimension, and not the experiential and personal. Our experience in this seminar supports our belief that both the cognitive and affective, the theoretical and the personal, are each necessary but not sufficient for the sort of transformation that many of our students experienced. While personal story-telling and written narratives and the emotional engagement and disorientation that these can create are a critical part of the transformative process, without new frameworks for making meanings of these stories and experiences students will often minimize what they hear and retreat to their former meaning schemes and the equilibrium of the status quo.

*Praxis – action and reflection.* As students applied their learning and stepped out of the course into the world, they reflected on that experience, which deepened their awareness and developed their sense of agency. One student described this experience as follows:

*I made the first effort to make a difference and thought very long and hard about the potential consequences for everyone potentially involved, including myself...In addition to my broadened awareness, I've also begun to learn language to talk about social justice and thus be able to better take action or speak up.*

*Role of facilitators/faculty – Self as instrument.* The course has been facilitated by the two of us, a Latina and a white Jewish man. In our ongoing work in this seminar we repeatedly find that our identities matter to how the class unfolds. We see our role in this process as providing an initial structure and reading list, creating and holding a safe space in which participants could engage in dialogue,

sharing our own theoretical and personal perspectives, and engaging in the dialogue ourselves by posing questions and offering feedback. We also model a way of engaging with others on these issues that is both supportive and challenging. We are able to utilize our own diversity to make interventions that are related to our lived experiences and social identities. Our role includes: modeling inquiry, supporting students to move beyond their comfort zones, tracking levels and depth of involvement, intervening strategically at individual and group levels, encouraging, confronting, challenging, collaborating, modeling our diverse partnership with mutual respect and maximization of our differences, challenging minimization and supporting differentiation.

Our authentic engagement with the group speaks powerfully to our being present with them as learning partners rather than “experts” who have the answers. We often inquire about group patterns to support the group in developing its capacity to challenge each other in critical ways and reflect on their contributions to these dynamics. When incidents of racism, sexism or classism are identified among group members, there are joint opportunities to use the group as a container to address these edges. The safety that is built at the foundation is absolutely necessary for the work of true intercultural communication to take place, and with it the development of relational and structural empathy.

### *Conclusion*

The internal phases of change and key process elements that we identify above are consistent with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning in regard to disorienting dilemmas, questioning assumptions, and reflective discourse; with a Freirian approach to dialogue and praxis (Freire, 1998); with the literature (Yorks and Kasl 2006) that puts more emphasis on the role of emotions in the transformation process; with the principles of intergroup dialogue and the transformative power of dialogue across difference combined with critical reflection (Nagda & Gurin, 2007; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003); and with the use of the IDI to encourage differentiation (Landis et. al., 2003). The more we can understand the internal change process that people experience as they develop the awareness and agency that enables them to work for social justice, the more effective we can be in catalyzing that process. Understanding where people are in their identity development and intercultural sensitivity can help us to “meet them where they are” and provide the appropriate blend of challenge and support. Transformative learning can and must be a tool for helping people to develop the knowledge, skills, and understandings they need to create a more just world.

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## **Social action as scaffolding for transformative learning: evidence from a case study**

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### **Abstract**

According to transformative learning theory, a perspective transformation is a radical change of the frames of references which frames an individual world view so as to make it more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. The new frames of reference are better than the previous because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true-justifiable to guide action. Transformative learning occurs when an individual encounters an alternative perspective and prior viewpoints are called into question. Most of the critics of transformative learning theory focus on its deficit to address social change, its neglect of power issues, its disregard for the cultural context of learning and its overemphasis on rational thought. My paper aims to contribute to the debate on the relationships between social action and perspective transformation. Using the narrative inquiry as research methodology we report here on experiences of a woman, employee at a Greek university, involved in a protracted strike defending her job against a governmental decision to dismiss a significant number of university employees. Our analysis is focused on spotting and examining transformations in the perspective adopted and applied in her daily life and work before and after her engagement in the particular collective social action of the strike and the potential learning opportunities created by her experiences.

### **The social context and the actors**

Administrative workers at the eight largest Greek universities carried out a strike for fourteen consecutive weeks which lasted from the first days of September until December 2013 with the support of the majority of teaching and research staff, as well as student body of these universities. The strikers were protesting against government plans to eliminate more than a thousand administration positions by placing the employees in a so-called “mobility pool”, which will see them fired if no other job is found for them in the public sector or in any other higher educational institution. Given the massive spending cuts being implemented by the Greek government the latest four years, the “mobility pool” was considered by the strikers as nothing more than a first step on the destruction of their careers and their road to unemployment, while at the same time many independent observers concluded that the measure will render Greek universities dysfunctional. Throughout the fourteen weeks of the strike the participants met every week at marathon and arduous assemblies where in a dramatic and charged atmosphere they discussed the course of their struggle, decided their further actions and elected a committee for managing and communicating their decisions from one week to the other.

Although it is well known, I may remind you that a strike, in general terms, is the event of work stoppage conducted by a group of employees, typically because of disputes with their employer over some conditions and terms of their work. A strike is not usually just a form of protest in the workplace, but a type of collective social action seeking to pressure employers into meeting demands before returning to work. Thus a strike as any collective social action disputes (according to the case and in a

varying extent and degree) existing material, cultural or psychological conditions in society. With this view in mind, the active participation of an individual in the collective social action of a strike creates conditions favoring transformations of belief structures, frames of references and perspectives and can therefore be considered as a starting point of a transformative learning process.

I conducted personally and discussed a long time with several university administrative workers on strike after their participation in their general assemblies and I had the opportunity to hear their thoughts, experiences and feelings. These people encountered the problem of losing or had the threat of losing their jobs, i.e. a destruction of their carriers generating an anomaly in their course of life that seemed impossible to be resolved through their current meaning schemes and the lack of resolution led them to a redefinition of the problem. Thus, a critical self-reflection of the assumptions that supported the meaning schemes or perspectives in use, could propel the necessary processes for transforming their current perspectives. Building on the informal evidence collected during these discussions I concluded that a perspective transformation occurred in many people who had been actively involved in the socio-political actions of this strike and against this background I launched a relevant study aimed at tracing terms and conditions, as well as characteristics of their perspective transformations. Taking into consideration, that as Clark (1993) has underlined is not only a disorienting dilemma a trigger to transformative learning, but so are "integrating circumstances" which he defines as periods of life in which the persons consciously or unconsciously search for something which is missing in their life and when they find this missing piece, a transformation process is catalyzed.

#### **The method and data of the study**

This paper reports on findings from this study being conducted with narrative inquiry as its research methodology. Narrative inquiry allows the researcher to include individual and collective stories in a study of the way humans experience the world—in our case, the social events that the participants in this strike experienced and their relevant thoughts and feelings.

From the narrations collected by interviewing persons who were participating in the action mentioned we selected, analyzed and present here the narration of a woman, administrative employee at the Technical University of Athens who recalls her active participation in the strike. The particular narration was selected with main criterion its authenticity and its realism in exposing her experiences lived and expressing her feelings. Moreover, we focus exclusively on those aspects of her story that reflect experiences associated to her perspectives transformation.

#### **Themes: social relationships, collective subconscious, and the emotions**

Traditional transformative learning theory considers critical reflection and critical self-reflection, as scaffolding to perspective transformation, which is described by Mezirow as *“the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally making choices or otherwise acting on these new understandings”* (1991 p. 167).

In a few words, a perspective transformation is a radical change of the broad set of structures which creating and assigning meaning frame an individual's world view.

In this account, three intertwined themes related to a perspective transformation emerged from the selected narration: the crucial role of social relationships, the emergence of a collective subconscious during social action and the importance of

emotions.

Each theme is illustrated in the following with quotes from the particular narration making the choice to include in our presentation fewer long quotes rather than several short quotes so as to preserve the authenticity and the realism of the story telling.

### **(1) The crucial role of social relationships.**

The woman narrating her experiences and feelings from her active participation in the strike values the collaboration, the mutual support and the comradeship with others in the particular community of her colleges as the following quotation illustrates.

*“We very soon realized the connection between the restructuring of the public universities and the threat of losing our jobs. We spoke to each other about our work from the first days of our strike onwards against the background of the public university, and vice versa. We talked about the public university in response to the right of every one of us to work... constantly palpating our limits, our weaknesses and strengths. Posing again and over again to ourselves and to our colleagues difficult questions and constantly redefining our answer and ... I feel that our every day was in a way gained.”*

Considering learning to be at the same time individual and contextual, the following quote is suggestive:

*“In these fourteen weeks we felt and we learned a lot of things. We built unprecedented and tender collectivities, where everyone found his/her place and where there was a place for everyone. We experienced, after many years, our work situation in a different way: at the same time we thought with horror how there will be when you will collect your things for the last time leaving your office, we get emotionally back to really inhabit our work place, we resorted to it, we protect it and in a curious way our workplace protected us. We also have experienced the public space differently: we went to strike gatherings knowing that our friends will be there, we listen with our colleagues to music and poetry at the times when the city sleeps, we filled with our voices the streets during our protest rallies, the same streets that in the past we walked silently, hastily, preoccupied in our personal problems.”*

The claim that social relationships are a crucial factor in self-reflection and potentially in a perspective transformation is in line with Taylor who suggest that *“It is through relationships that learners develop the necessary openness and confidence to deal with learning on an affective level, which is essential for managing the threatening and emotionally charged nature of a transformative learning experience. Without the medium of relationships, critical reflection is impotent and hollow, lacking the genuine discourse necessary for thoughtful and in-depth reflection”* (Taylor, 1997, p. 42).

However, it may be admitted that the relationship between social action and transformative learning has been one of the most controversial issues (Collard and Law 1989; Cunningham 1992; Griffin 1987; Hart 1990; Newman 1994) and the same time one of the most interesting, theoretically and empirically, questions.

### **(2) The emergence of a collective subconscious during social action**

A state of collective subconscious seems to have been emerged through the participation in the strike widening the view of the individual woman beyond herself



so as to recognize the others, incorporating them into her perspective concerning the future. By subconscious is meant the totality of mental processes which are not currently in focal awareness of the individuals.

The following quotation describes crucial aspects of a process of a collective subconscious emerging during the social action of the strike.

*“In the beginning of our first general assembly we thought that at least we have to take an action so as not to leave our jobs with a bowed head. But suddenly within our silent indignation we sensed that the issue exceeded by far our personal stance, luck or fear...”*

*“We felt so violent the attack against our jobs that we almost forced to look the danger of our everyday lives across the whole of its spectrum, to understand the circumscription of a threat which concerned more than our individual lives.”*

As a result of her active involvement in the strike our interviewee introduces herself to, and feels a member of, a collective subject struggling to defend the right to work as her following excerpt makes clear.

*“After that we now know that we are not alone, that we have comrades everywhere. In the schools, in the streets, in the dismissed workers of Spider commercial company, in the employees of Coca Cola company, in the public hospitals, in the Hellenic Radio-Television personnel, in Skouries area ...”* (These are public and private enterprises where strikes of their workers were taken place and places where successful or not public protests have been organized are mentioned here).

At the same time, an aggressive and authoritarian response of authorities conceived by our interviewee as a threat and assigned an associated meaning seems to reinforce an already rising collective subconscious.

*“They (she means the responsible governmental officials) confronted us with authoritarianism, intimidation and violence, trying to disperse us as a collectivity and to isolate every one of us. Instead of such a result, they unwittingly led all of us to find a common ground, to device new alliances, to bring out and to enjoy the elective affinities with so many people that we recently discovered full of pride and emotion.*

*They tried to transform our collective demands to personal dilemmas believing that will finally run out on the safety of individual solutions...”*

*“In the questions posed, I felt that each one of us as me answered that our perplexity, our obedience, our silence are not a one-way reaction, that our dreams for the future are not yet dead and that we are not talk about ourselves alone. We speak on the name of all of us because we all need a win, even for the first time in our life.”*

The role of a collective subconscious in an individual perspective transformation is rather obvious in the above quotes and as a factor involved in a perspective transformation has also been indicated by several studies referred as a compassion for others (e.g., Courtenay, Merriam, & Reeves, 1998) or as a new connectedness with others (e.g., Laswell, 1994).

### **(3) The importance of emotions.**

A reading of the narration offered by the woman of our study focusing on the feelings

which accompanied her experiences illustrates the equal importance of emotions to rational thinking in a self-reflecting process that seems to have been initiated.

The quotation that follows expresses the involvement of emotions in the critical reflection on the experiences lived by our interviewee while participating in the collective action of the strike.

*“This strike prompted us to understand that there are many other workers in a similar situation as we were, it awoke sensitivities hidden deep in ourselves, it taught us to be vigilant, in vigilance political and emotional at the same time.”*

The contribution of feelings in the emergence of a subconscious which transcends the individual to meet the collective is clear in the following quote.

*“We experienced a heavy mourning for the person who has been murdered in the dark of the night, for the other man who was led to death inside a police station or in a concentration camp for migrants.”* (She referred to current acts of violence against immigrants in Athens).

Emotional reactions expressed in the following quotation, though perhaps overly, seem to strongly influence a transformational process.

*“We felt a pleasure for every victory we were achieving, we felt anger at each attack against us and we reacted stubbornly to our defeats, considered to be defeats of all of us. We shared our soul to people who had just met because we felt that we were together after our meeting, we lived the solidarity, the true affection for the everyday life of our neighbors as well as for the everyday life of the others who were no longer strangers. We learned how to decide in common, not in the name of a fictitious unanimity or in the name of an artificial certainty for our decisions and certainly not without trouble. We remembered the value of participation - in the small scale of our action we took a breath of direct democracy and this event is as charming as it sounds in my words.”*

As Taylor (2000) has underlined many studies on transformative learning concluded that a great attention has been given to critical thinking but not on emotional aspects of learning and in particular on the role of emotions and feelings on the processes of perspective transformations. However, it may be concluded from a considerable number of empirical studies that emotional reasoning plays a primary role in initiating and supporting the development of critical thinking (op.cit.).

Adopting the view that contexts for adult learning may be considered as “emotional battlegrounds” with learners vying for recognition and authority (Brookfield, 1993) I have in another paper (Giannakopoulou, 2011) outlined the crucial role of emotions in adult learning on the particular case of changing their stance towards, and involved in a process of learning, mathematics. From a point of view of adult learning, though a further step in research is needed to understand how emotions are related to critical reflection and then to a perspective transformation, we may claim that emotions may not be viewed as separate but as interdependent to any other factors in the transformative learning processes.

### **Concluding comments**

Taylor (2000) drawing conclusions from a survey of research on transformative learning commented that it has not been fully understood why some disorienting

dilemmas led to a perspective transformation while others do not, although crucial factors of transformative learning have been thoroughly investigated.

Towards an answer to this and similar questions, the data offered by this study suggest a greater attention to be given to the role of social contexts in an individual's perspective transformation and in particular on the social and political forces which act on, and transform the individual learning experiences. This suggestion is in line with several studies related to transformative learning issues which address the significance of context in the transformative learning processes (e.g., Clark, 1992; Sveinunggaard, 1994).

On the other hand as put by Newman (2012, p. 51) learning has many and different aspects each one dominated by different acts of learning. In his view, learning may be instrumental, communicative, affective, interpretive, essential, critical, political, passionate, and moral and a “good learning” incorporates all these aspects as he underlines “*with all the ambiguity the word (good) implies*”. Applying this classification, the learning that seems to be fueled from the perspective transformation traced in this study may be described as critical, political and affective learning.

The critical aspect of learning “*is to do with appraisal. We learn to take nothing for granted. We separate out “truth” from “ideology,” acknowledge conflicts of interest, and ask, “In whose interests was this statement made or that action taken?” This aspect helps us to understand that relationships, however benign, are expressions of power.*” (op.cit.)

Statements like the following that appear in the narration of our interviewee indicate a process of critical learning, “*we very soon realized the connection between the restructuring of the public universities and the threat of losing our jobs*”, “*we talked about the public university in response to the right of every one of us to work*”, “*they confronted us with authoritarianism, intimidation and violence, trying to disperse us as a collectivity and to isolate every one of us*”, “*they tried to transform our collective demands to personal dilemmas believing that will finally run out on the safety of individual solutions*”.

The political aspect of learning, as defined by Newman (op.cit.), “*is about examining conflicts of interest and expressions of power in order to make judgments. In making judgments we take sides. And in taking sides we join with others to take action. This aspect helps us decide how we can help our friends, work with our allies, and deal with our enemies.*”

Expressions such as the following which are included in the narration analyzed denote an aspect of political learning, “*we also have experienced the public space differently, we sensed that the issue exceeded by far our personal stance, luck or fear*”, “*we now know that we are not alone, that we have comrades everywhere*”, “*this strike prompted us to understand that there are many other workers in a similar situation as we were.*”

The affective aspect of learning as specified by Newman (op.cit.), “*is to do with how we react to people and events. We come to understand what emotions are, the ranges of emotions we are capable of, and how we might manage them. It helps us bring the way we feel to the way we think, and so provides a balance to the way we respond to the world.*”

Phrases as “*in these fourteen weeks we felt and we learned a lot of things*”, “*we get emotionally back to really inhabit our work place*”, “*this strike... awoke sensitivities hidden deep in ourselves, it taught us to be vigilant, in vigilance political and emotional at the same time*”, “*we experienced a heavy mourning for the person who...*”, “*we felt a pleasure for every victory we were achieving, we felt anger at each*

*attack against us”, we shared our soul to people who had just met”* which appear in the self-reported experiences of the woman interviewed are indicative of an affective type of learning.

From a differing viewpoint, these are those acts of learning that Foley, emphasizing the informal nature of social movement learning, has called “learning in the struggle” (Foley, 1999, p. 39).

On these grounds we suggest a rethinking of the conception of learning, implied by Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, towards a view of learning as a situated cognition, which brings together the elements of cognition, perception, and action within a social context and which put the emphasis away from the individual and toward the social setting and the groups of people within such settings. Knowledge accrues through everyday life, and even the mundane actions of day-to-day living contribute to the person’s and the group’s perspectives and world-views. Kilgore (1999) arguing that the relationship between individual and group learning should be reexamined suggests that in order to understand learning in social movements, the group itself has to be viewed as a learner.

In such a view, learning transcends the narrow boundaries of the psychological and conceives knowledge as personally, socially and culturally situated, “distributed-stretched over, not divided among mind, body, activity, and cultural organized settings” (Lave, 1988, p. 1).

A view of learning as located in relations among persons who are acting in specific settings, such that the setting and the learning process contribute to the definition of self and the structure of cognition could possibly offer explanation to many open questions of transformative learning theory, as is for instance the question why some disorienting dilemmas lead to a perspective transformation whilst others do not.

An enquiry into the context within which disorienting dilemmas emerge may steer us to an in depth understanding of disorienting dilemmas as significant life events and finally to reveal the social and emotional nature of a perspective transformation.

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## **Re-narrating a Moral Self in a Neoliberal Context: Transformative Learning for Building Social Solidarities**

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### **Abstract**

To address the denigration of social solidarities and deliberative democracy in the neoliberal era, this paper addresses the findings from three Canadian studies regarding the potential of re-narrating a moral self as an element for rebuilding social solidarities. Transformative learning is discussed from within a relational epistemology.

### **Purpose of Paper**

In 30 years, the rise of neoliberalism has systematically denigrated the social welfare state, dissembled various forms of social solidarity, desiccated active democracy, and undermined the state role as regulator and arbiter, while increasing the power of economic elites, corporate freedom and individualism (Harvey, 2005). Charles Taylor (2004) suggests that the Western social imaginary or how Western contemporaries came to imagine the society they inhabit, was a new conception of a moral order. The Western social imaginary has been shaped by three assumptions: the idea of a self-governing people, the public sphere as a place for deliberation on issues of mutual concern, and society as an economy for exchanging goods and services for mutual prosperity. The last assumption of economics as a defining feature of society has emerged dominant. We present empirical findings from three Canadian studies that rethink transformative learning within a relational epistemology, particularly the potential of re-narrating the moral self, vital for deliberative democracy and re-imagining a new moral order.

### **Context**

In 19th and early 20th century Canada, the purpose of adult education was to develop a vibrant democracy and industrial economy through the provision of literacy, numeracy, scientific and technical knowledge, and leadership skills, grounded in a larger social covenant dedicated to social inclusion and participatory citizenship, as a newly democratizing but far flung nation. Later, the post-war welfare state enjoyed almost a universal consensus as it navigated the contending goals of private enterprise and economic growth with social protection and political stability (Mishra, 1984), enshrined in key pieces of legislation in the 1960s. With the Liberal Trudeau government in the 1970s, education was considered a human right and a key component of a "just society." However, Canada joined the first experiments of neoliberal economics and New Right ideology in the 1980s. By 1995, a landmark budget would cut government spending to pre-1951 levels, significantly reshaping social policy in Canada. The result was the elimination of many organizations from a vibrant civil society sector and one of the quickest growing income gaps among industrialized countries (Campbell, 2011).

As Rubenson and Walker (2006) have argued, the neo-liberal agenda eclipsed the liberal humanist commitment among adult educators, representing an abdication of responsibilities for the most vulnerable citizens. The growing professionalization and institutionalization of adult education led to a gradual shift of learning opportunities

away from community-based organizations and social movements toward human resource development, corporate training, professional learning and other work-related learning. Those with the highest literacy and education levels (65% already have a university education) are the ones with the most access to education and 83% of all adult education now relates to work. Yet, 42.2% of Canadians are thought to have a literacy level too low for their current roles as workers, citizens and family members. A 2010 report from the Canadian Council on Learning asserts that Canada is not building a “knowledge advantage”, as it continues to fall behind in key areas of learning across the lifespan. In 2012, the Harper government restructured postsecondary education and research funding, explicitly stating that it should be business-led and industry relevant (Government of Canada, 2012). Correspondingly, Turner (2013) recounts the systematic war on science and research-based knowledge by Harper's government.

Barlow and Campbell (1991) suggest that a legacy of this neoliberal era is political illiteracy, supplemented by other studies that report Canadians have a weak sense of citizenship and low political efficacy. Yet, in 2012 alone, scientists protested cuts to research funding on Parliament Hill, Quebec university students protested tuition hikes of 75% catalysing a mass protest against neoliberalism, and the “Idle No More” used flash-mob round dances, prayer circles and blockades to assert demands for indigenous sovereignty and opposition to legislation that threatened indigenous ability to protect their land and waters and weakened environmental law. However, this government continues to illustrate its hostility to public deliberation.

As adult educators, then, how do we address the systematic weakening of social solidarity, adults socialized into neoliberal assumptions, and build on emerging social movements? How do we address the other two aspects of the Western social imaginary - the ongoing capacities needed for a self-governing people and the public sphere as a place for deliberation on issues of mutual concern? Moreover, how do we contribute to inspiring a new social imaginary founded on a relational way of knowing and being? This paper offers several interrelated findings and early theorizing from three studies to contribute to this dialogue.

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Research Designs**

Situated in the critical tradition, the first study (Lange, 2004; 2009) drew from Freire supplemented by Mezirow. Transformative learning was understood as societal transformation through fostering a consciousness of situatedness within larger politico-economic forces and stimulating citizen deliberation and action. Using action research this study explored pedagogical entry points for sustainability education and complex intersections between personal and social transformation, namely the dynamics of belief change as well as change in material relations and civic involvement. In five offerings in a university extension course with over 50 participants, Freirean pedagogy was reversed by engaging participants in analysing personal issues within the context of cultural messages and sustainability principles first, prior to a more abstract social and economic analysis; considered appropriate for an individualistic culture. Data collection comprised pre-, mid-, and post surveys, interviews and written journals. The longitudinal findings are being analyzed through relational epistemologies (Best & Kellner, 1997; Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

One emerging concept is the relational self, building on social constructionism but going beyond, drawing selectively from feminist, postcolonial, ecological, and Aboriginal theories and epistemologies. What these particular relational views share is

that all beings, human and nonhuman, are mutually dependent and interconnected within a social and ecological world. As social constructionist Gergen (2011) explains, “what we take to be knowledge of the world and self finds its origins in human relationships” (p. 635). From time in the womb and through birthing, individuality is defined from within social relations. Yet, beyond this, human beings are constituted by *all* their relations. Noddings in Thayer-Bacon (2003) both agree, “relation is ontologically basic...and universal for all of us...the celebrated autonomy of individuals may be an illusion; interdependence ...better describes the reality of selves” (pp. ix, 106). Each person is embodied, experiences the human and more-than-human world in specific ways, and has unique experiences, thereby producing a qualitatively unique self-in-relation, called the core identity. But the relational self is not understood in the modernist sense; it is not unitary and mentalist, it is not about mastery and defined in opposition to others. Rather it is multiple and fractured as we experience the self in various and changing ways according to context. A “relational epistemology views knowing as something that is socially constructed by embedded, embodied people who are in relation with each other” (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 10).

The purpose of the second study, by Solarz (2013), was theory-building about learning within a workplace conflict coaching process. Many conflict specialists, especially those in organizational programs, find that people more frequently opt for coaching than mediation to work through conflicts; yet, there is little academic literature to guide practice. Although conflict resolution has been considered in transformative learning (see Fisher-Yoshida, 2005), the practice of conflict coaching does not appear in adult education literature; thus, the intention of this second study was to build theory about learning within workplace conflict coaching, a new field lacking scholarly research and theoretical rigour.

The study was situated in an internal conflict resolution program within a 12,000-person healthcare system in Canada. Twenty-five coaching sessions and three semi-structured retrospective interviews totalling over 35 hours were recorded and transcribed, supplemented by coaching journals, field notes, and analytical memos. Data analysis was conducted in three phases in accordance with constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006): initial coding; analytic memo writing capturing insights and developing focused codes; and category development using theoretical sampling to test categories and diagramming of conceptual relationships. Theoretical categories were refracted through literature to develop a low-level, substantive theory.

Moore (2005) has argued for a transtheoretical model of human change that would integrate transformative learning theory and theories derived from other disciplines. Although the second study did not attempt to produce a metatheory, it nonetheless drew from transformative learning theory, constructivist psychology, and transformative conflict theory (Bush & Folger, 2005) to understand the contributions of client, coach, and context to learning. Where transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2012) delineates the process by which learners might change their frames of reference, constructivist psychology offers insight into how such frames of reference, as well as notions of self and other, are socially constructed. Furthermore, constructivist psychologists explore the mechanisms by which dialogue with others affects a co-construction of the self, including the moral self (Tappan, 1999).

Bush and Folger's (2005) transformative conflict theory is premised on a relational



worldview where individual agency and social connection form the essence of human nature. The “human moral sense” is exercised by “balancing the claims of self and other and the relation of the two” (p. 74). From this perspective, then, the dilemma experienced by people in conflict is a moral one because conflict “alienates them from their sense of their own strength and their sense of connection to others, thereby disrupting and undermining the interaction between them as human beings” (p. 46).

The third study (Lange, in press), part of a North American comparative case study project, was an examination of a broad-based organization that emerged in response to neoliberal reforms in one Canadian province which was profoundly reshaping the public, private and civil society sectors. As a city-wide alliance of over 50 different members —faith groups, unions, community organizations, professional organizations, immigrant and ethnocultural organizations, and small businesses—it was multi-sector, multi-issue and aimed at achieving significant policy and practice changes. This study explored the relationship between community organizing and adult education, the process of political leadership education, and scaling up social change toward broadened claims and actors, in a context that had marginalized or dismantled various forms of social solidarity present in civil society. Data was collected through interviews of members and allies and through participant observation.

### **Findings**

In modernity, people decide their own convictions and the ways in which they will live, a process of self-authorship. The modern view has been of a mental world (in here) and a material world (out there) (Gergen, 2011). An autonomous individual is the locus of morality, guided by personal conscience and private reflection. Thus, a dominant unitary moral and ethical horizon no longer exists. Charles Taylor (1991) traces how the larger horizons of meaning, such as duty in worldly affairs as the highest moral activity, were lost. Society itself would come to be conceived of as atomistic individuals all pursuing their own fulfillment, with no greater purpose than the freedom of doing so. Borgmann (1992) explains that individualism is a troublesome, not cohering well with notions of commonwealth, communal ties, and the democratic public square, identifying the challenges for adult educators concerned with the public good.

### ***Restorative learning and the losses of modernity***

While the general public is often described as in denial about social and environmental issues, or resistant to change given vested interests, the first study (Lange, 2004), found participants to be deeply concerned about social and environmental issues with a sense of responsibility to bring about change for a better future. Yet, they described the constraints as they lived the contradictions of modernity/postmodernity.

The individualism ideology has impressed upon citizens the control they *ought to* exert over their own lives. The assumption deeply embedded in our psyche is that we have control over ourselves—if nothing else, our state of mind—and it is each individual's responsibility to create their own life success. The primary contradiction was the deep sense of personal responsibility to change what they didn't like or agree with as citizens and the sense of futility and impotence in making a significant difference to impact social and environmental crises. Yet, they did not want to blame other individuals or institutions for problems because that would imply shirking individual responsibility and lacking individual power. This illustrates how

consciousness has been structured in a Western society veiling a core contradiction that limits the language of possibility and agency. What lies below, also, are conflicting ethics.

Many Western middle-class people project their ethical horizons and identity as moral beings into their profession or work position. There was little uncertainty about their moral and ethical horizons—honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, respect, loyalty, and community service—despite ontological origins. However, they described an increasing loss of space to speak about or act on their ethics. Their ethics did not require transformation, but restoration to a rightful place in their lives. The illusion was that they could carry out their civic responsibilities and thereby “make a difference” in society through their work. They described how the ethics at work and personal ethics conflicted, generating a significant disillusionment. Bureaucratic dynamics, instrumental procedures, and utilitarian ethics blocked the ability of individuals to act with ethical autonomy. Some participants were threatened and one lost his job when acting to protect the public good as part of professional ethics.

Participants further described a sense of fragmentation that compounds lack of ethical efficacy, exacerbated by the business ideology of scarcity, competitiveness, and efficiency. Mechanistic structures in home life override an organic sense of time in relationships as well as biological and psychological needs. The drive to “be and do as much as we can” for a fulfilled life means that people are whirling between relational expectations and fragmented identities without any sense of a larger reference point. Not only did they identify the conflicts between their personal, professional and organizational ethics, but with broader public ethics as well. Through a clarification process, individuals were able to restore their ethics and find ways to more consciously animate their ethical autonomy. They listened more deeply to their own biography and began restorying it through the ethic of sustainability. Many actions were catalyzed: reduced work hours, quitting jobs, creating self employment, starting new educational programs as well as joining unions, social movements, and community organizations.

As part of sustainability education, participants relearned flowing with organic time. They became attentive to relational not clock time. They reconnected with and began to understand the ecology of wild spaces and Earth time as slow, seasonal and embodied, creating a sense of being in place. They cultivated mindfulness, gratitude, and other contemplative practices. They decluttered physical and mental spaces and reduced consumption. They researched bioregional sources of water and food and began to enjoy noncommodified simple pleasures. Not only did the participants have an epistemological change in their structure of their thinking and the content of their worldview, they also newly experienced a radical relatedness. Profoundly, this was a transformation from a “mode of having” to a “mode of being.” Fromm (1976) explains shifting to a mode of being as breaking through the property structures of one's consciousness and material existence. Elgin (1993) called this the move from the materiality of existence to the spirituality of existence. Exemplified was an ontological transformation when individuals see themselves as part of the larger principle of Life.

### ***Restorative learning and the moral self***

The second study (Solarz, 2013) similarly found restorative learning as a reconnection with the moral-ethical self and uncovered a relationship between transformative and restorative learning. As each of the participants worked with the conflict coach, it was

clear that the destabilizing nature of interpersonal conflict disrupted their sense of self-concept and identities, and precipitated a disorienting dilemma. Bush and Folger (2005) describe the simultaneous desire to be both autonomous and connected, as an expression of the “human moral sense” where moral is defined as “balancing the claims of self and other and the relation of the two (p. 74 ).” This proved to be a valuable *pedagogical entry point* (Lange, 2004) in conflict coaching.

Rossiter (1999) notes that difficult experiences inspire narrative activity as a way to make meaning of the experience. Although the narrators of *conflict stories* may feel reassured of the merits of their negative thoughts and feelings, they nevertheless remain distressed by the distorted depictions of themselves and others that such stories inevitably offer. In contrast to other personal narratives, stories that arise from conflict often have a clear, strong moral component given their themes of injury and wrongdoing. However, “stories of suffering [also] evoke reflection, reevaluation, and redirection” (Charmaz, 1999) and require not only a narrator but an audience—in this case, a conflict coach. Conflict coaching offered participants a reflective dialogical space in which they could identify and explore the disparity between their current self-in-conflict and their ideal moral self that underpinned the painful sense of fractured relationality. Reworking conflict narratives was a process of reconnecting with the moral self and then further developing it through narrative re-storying.

Reflection on the structure of their thoughts and patterns of action are often not conscious until conflict is experienced. Shotwell (2011) explains that “the implicit may be visible primarily at...points of breakdown in our conceptual selves. When our own self-conception reveals itself as contradictory...there is the possibility of ‘seeing’ implicit understanding” (p.xvi). We create, establish, and evolve our identities and self-concept in dialogue with others (Tappan, 1999). Listeners’ responses are fateful:

Audiences play a role in shaping recollections, and in doing so they also play a role in shaping identities. The outcome of this process can be stability in self-conceptions or change, because conversational reconstructions of the past can involve the rehearsal of existing self-conceptions or discarding old self-views and constructing novel ones.... Conversational remembering can shape identity (Pasupathi, 2001, p. 663).

Moreover, in their dialogical self theory, Hermans & Hermans-Konopka’s (2010) explain that each party in a dialogue assumes multiple roles (or *positions*) within and between themselves, making the nature of their interaction dynamic and interpenetrating. The moral discourse that occurred in conflict coaching might be described, then, as a dialogical restoring and re-storying of the moral self.

In conflict coaching, restorative learning was seen to precede transformative learning. In parallel fashion, the transformative theory of conflict (Bush & Folger, 2005) observes that restoring internal strength, or making “empowerment shifts,” enables parties to engage in perspective taking and creative thinking to transform the conflict. Noting that the restorative-transformative learning dialectic and the transformative theory of conflict follow similar progressions suggests that restorative learning may be more typical in transformative learning processes than previously understood.

### ***Restorative learning and neoliberalism***

The Greater Edmonton Alliance (GEA) was originally part of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), based on the pioneering political concepts and processes of

American Saul Alinsky. For Alinsky (1971) and successor Ed Chambers (2004), politics is not a game, but the ancient concept of sovereign citizens gathering to deliberate and act for the common good. Alinsky believed that social justice could still be attained within the American democratic system, despite centripetal forces toward power concentration. As a criminologist in the 1930s Chicago “Back-of-the-Yards” neighbourhood, one of the largest slums amid the stockyards and factory complexes, Alinsky crafted a hard-nosed, confrontational political style based on the “formula of *agitate, antagonise, educate and organise*” (Ledwith, 2005, p. 93). He developed an “organization of organizations” – embracing churches, labour unions, small business, and youth committees – to foster mass participation in the democratic process, generate power across multiple sectors and achieve political gains. The independence of broad-based organizations is guaranteed by organizational membership dues and paid professional organizers.

Two Edmontonians with experience of the IAF, initiated discussions with other Edmonton activists in the late 1990s about the possibility of creating an Alinsky-style broad-based organization, just as the worst public cutbacks were being felt, reducing government services by 20% and offering market alternatives. Protest was ignored, so a city-wide organizing model using collective direct action across social, economic and environmental issues was attractive. It would take seven years, however, to build a formal membership base and raise enough money for paid organizers.

Chambers (2004) asserts we are political beings by nature (p. 18), and thus public life should be a natural vocation as part of citizenship (p. 71). Thus, extensive leadership training is a key element of Alinsky organizing, meant to kindle a sense of political vocation and educate leaders in civic skills and the exercise of power in public life. Intensive and long term mentoring supports self-development, and teaches participatory democracy concepts and political and organizing skills, a form of adult education (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001).

In a reversal of Alinsky thinking, Chambers asserts that relationships come before issues (Chambers, 2004, p. 46). The first step in building a broad-based organization is fondly called “relationals” - one-on-one 30-minute meetings carried out 3-4 times with each person. The Edmonton organizing team brought in IAF trainers for a growing group of leaders. Hundreds of individual relational meetings took place, further identifying leaders and potential organizational members. This systematically forms a network of power with deep and diverse roots in the community (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001). What is significant about these relationals is that they are designed to discuss a person’s ideals and identify moral and ethical contradictions in the public sphere, using this gap between the ideal and real to draw people to community organizing and harness their ‘passion capital’.

The second step is the IAF 10-day leadership workshop which trains the body, spirit, and mind in the use of power, including overriding normal deference to authority and expertise. Every year, additional leaders would attend these “schools for public life.” Part of learning political capacity is the ability to withstand heat and tension, needed for real change. In Chambers’ (2004) words, “there is no nice, polite way to get change” (p. 31) as controversy and conflict are needed to till the ground for change. Finally, leaders learn the cycle of organizing—research, action, and evaluation—including a power analysis of their opposition, allies and money, identification of

concrete winnable actions, and then setting up a public action to capture media attention and public support. After a public action, an evaluation occurs where “[h]appenings become experiences when they are digested...reflected on, related to general patterns, and synthesized” (Alinsky, 1971, p. 69).

Hybridizing IAF processes to the Canadian context, the Greater Edmonton Alliance has had numerous impacts: holding the city accountable for implementing an affordable housing policy, catalyzing a comprehensive local food strategy to protect agricultural capacity within urban limits, and generating a social enterprise involving green retrofits of existing housing stock, contributing to the municipal goal of a sustainable, carbon-neutral city. Moreover, deftly using public actions, citizen education and media coverage to illustrate the workings of power, GEA contributed to a shift in the public's political and environmental consciousness. They have also brokered complex, innovative relationships across public, private and nonprofit sectors, scaling up the impact and range of change. Through exemplary adult education in political leadership, GEA has fostered higher levels of civic engagement, holding government and business more accountable to citizens.

### **Intersections and Implications**

As Best and Kellner (1997) suggest, we are currently in transition between the modern and postmodern epochs, as significant as the shift from medieval to modern. This transition is constituted by paradigm shifts in multiple sciences and social sciences, where constellations of beliefs, values and techniques shared by communities are transforming. They see the changes as noncumulative and discontinuous, asserting there is no consensus other than the identification of an emerging paradigm itself.

According to Taylor (2004), as a set of social practices gradually transforms in its meaning for people, it will eventually constitute a new social imaginary. Following David Harvey's (2010) dialectic of historical change, it involves: technologies and organizational forms, production and labour processes, institutional and administrative arrangements, relations to nature, the reproduction of daily life, and mental conceptions of reality. The intersections in these findings illustrate the transformative learning simultaneously occurring in these spheres of activity. Common to the transformative processes for the participants was a questioning rooted in contradictions and conflict, precipitating a re-connection to the moral-ethical self and rethinking about the moral order of society – including in work sites, home places, the public sphere and the natural world. Not only was transformative learning an epistemological change, but an ontological one founded on relationality. Drawing from living systems theory, these changes are not disparate but are changes that can be amplified and can accumulate to challenge constraints and open degrees of freedom; they can cause perturbations that ripple out through webs of connections and generate new patterns (Lange, 2012). While each study lacked some of the spheres of activity of the other studies, they were all undergirded by a relational epistemology and ontology. This ethic of relationality and relational way of knowing is fundamental to rebuilding social solidarities, deliberative democracy and imagining a new moral order.

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**ACCESS / INCLUSION / EXCLUSION**



## **Reflections Behind Bars. Transformative Learning Inside the Prison**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to highlight the transformations that took place in the views of a group of young prisoners as a result of their participation in a narrative workshop, where the prisoners told and heard autobiographical stories. The transformations that emerged during the workshop are connected with the decision of the migrants to leave their country, the causes that led them to prison and their plans for the future.

### **Education inside the prison**

The need for the education of prisoners has been emphasized for nearly a century in the context of different disciplines such as psychology, sociology, social anthropology, etc. Given both that the world has seen a significantly high ratio between illiteracy and criminality (Wilson, 1996) and also that prison is not a neutral space, but is generally in itself criminogenic (Warner, 2007), prison education is a very significant dimension of life in prison.

According to Diseth et al (2008) prison education is important “both as a means for preparing inmates for life after prison and of providing meaningful activities for the inmates during imprisonment”. Prison education may also change the inmates’ attitudes toward life in general, lead to improved self-esteem, confidence, and self-awareness (Tootoonchi, 1993). According to Morin (1981) education for the inmates is a dimension full of hope and promise. It helps him to find a meaning of life, to justify his existence, to determine his conduct and behaviors. Tootoonchi (1993) claims that inmates who attend educational programmes while they are incarcerated are less likely to return to prison following their release and help them find a good job upon release and resist committing further offences. Through the education the prisoners “learn to see their situation more objectively, to put aside feelings of hostility, to stop the habit of acting impulsively and the tendency to see things in black and white. They learn to move beyond that inarticulate and immobilizing sense of “I’m the only who has ever felt this way, so you can’t teach me anything”. (McLaughlin, M., Trounstine, J., Waxler, R.P. 1997: 18).

Characteristically Warner (2002) emphasizes that the ability of prisoners to participate in educational programs during incarceration is an answer to the question “do we have citizens in prison or do we have prisoners?”

However, given the peculiarities of education in prisons, what is the most effective type of education for prisoners? According to Council of Europe (1990:14) “firstly, the education of prisoners must, in its philosophy, methods and content, be brought as close as possible to the best adult education in society outside, secondly education should be constantly seeking ways to link prisoners with the outside community and to enable both groups to interact with each other as fully and as constructively as possible”.

A significant number of researchers who have worked in this area highlight the need for the presence of the characteristics of adult learning in educational programs conducted in jail. Kerka (1995) claims that successful prison literacy programs should be tailored to the prison culture. They should be learner centered and participatory, put literacy into meaningful contexts and motivate and sustain learner interests. According to Costelloe and Warner (2003) prison education must mirror the

best practice of adult education. This means that the role of teacher and learner should be interchangeable and learners should take active responsibility of their learning. The educator creates the best climate for learning, but learning should be self directed.

Adult education techniques such as collaborative learning in small groups are used successfully in many prison education programmes. In that context prisoners are engaged in supportive discussion through a constructivist view of learning where the learners construct their own meaning of knowledge (Prison Education Service 2002). Brown and Caddick (in Higgins, 2004) emphasize that work in groups, a dominant technique in adult education, helps develop prisoners' self-reflection. This, in turn, helps to strengthen them and builds positive attitudes both towards themselves and to others.

The need to link the content of education to the needs and motivations of learners is a key feature in adult education. This becomes even more important in prison education. According to Diseth et al (2008) an educational process in prisons is much more likely to succeed if the content is directly related to the motivation of the prisoners.

In relation to the issue of motivation in prison education, Manger et al (2010) argue that the mobilization of prisoners must follow the "pulled from the front" approach which assumes that individuals act purposefully in accordance with their intentions. In contrast the "pushed from behind" approach which pushes the inmates toward a given course of actions is often away from the real needs and intentions of prisoners. The "pulled from the front" approach gives inmates incentives associated with both improving their stay in prison and with issues of social and vocational integration after release. In this way, prisoners voluntarily respond to educational programs conducted in jail and not because they are forced to do so. On the other hand, studies have shown (Manger et al, 2010) that a key reason many prisoners participate in educational programs is not their educational needs and the content of education, but the deep desire to escape the daily routine of prison.

Diseth et al (2008) focus on the specific obstacles faced by learners in prisons. Besides the typical obstacles encountered by adult learners, such as previous negative educational experiences, as well as internal barriers related to low self-image, education in prison presents a large number of external barriers. These are: the prevalence of overcrowding in most prisons, the lack of funds for training activities, the lack of educational resources and materials, issues of guarding and security and transporting of prisoners to another prison.

Higgins (2004: 248) highlights the often negative opinions and attitudes to the educational process by the staff of the prison as an additional obstacle facing educators and learners in prisons. Several members of the prison staff consider the educational activities "a waste of resources because the correct response to offending lies in the control of individuals".

The internal barriers of prisoner learners are also significantly greater than those faced by learners in a formal adult education setting. Inmates function in conditions of heightened stress which significantly affects their psychology and overall mood. Similarly, Corcoran (1985) points out the stressfulness for the teacher who must learn to work in completely different conditions from those in which they have usually been trained. According to him, the stress level of the teacher is even higher in the high-security prison, where despite the increased protective measures in place, the prison teacher is face to face with many special case detainees. According to Fox (1991) working conditions in prison often act as an obstacle to teachers trying to effectively

implement the principles of adult education. This has negative effects on the success of educational objectives and the satisfaction of learners.

Appropriate teacher training for those working in prisons is a prerequisite for the successful development of education programs in prisons. The training will adequately prepare teachers for the specific conditions prevailing in prisons and help them find ways to overcome the obstacles they face. Costelloe and Warner (2003) claim that prison educators must be very aware of what it is they are doing, why they are doing it and how best to do it.

### **Prison education and transformative learning**

According to Costelloe and Warner (2003) critical reflexivity must be an essential element of the daily practice and policy in prison education. Critical reflection challenges the prisoners' preconceptions and prejudices and facilitates a greater degree of change people and their lives than offence focused work. Having in mind that crime is the outcome of oppressive social structures as colonialism, patriarchy and capitalism, education "should encourage conscientization that will give individuals emancipator insight into their location within these structures" (Higgins, 2004: 247).

Warner (2002) claims that prison education should be a transformative education, following Mezirow's perceptions about transformative learning. She suspects the "criminogenic focused courses" that lead to only superficial change and they do not effect the consciousness of prisoners. Therefore the consciousness raising process is very important for prisoners, because through it they could re-evaluate and re-interpret their identity and understand that their problems are not a result of personal failure, but are rooted in social structures and in the power relations of society. Morrow (2008: 339) speaking of the use of reflective practice in an education program in prisons, states: "The power of reflective practice proved extremely strong. During class time offenders I had worked with for a long time suddenly became philosophers, psychologists, teachers. Their thinking appeared to grow to a higher level. Neither they nor I had anticipated this. Each participant had their own experiences and emotions to contribute to the class discussions."

Likewise, Page (2009) describes how using a lemon mobilized the critical reflection of a prisoner learner. The aroma of lemon peel, which the prisoner had not smelt for many years, was a smell from the outside world, a smell of freedom. This functioned as a disorienting dilemma for the prisoner and mobilized the critical reflection on their life to date. Another form of disorienting dilemma for prisoners may be autobiographical narratives and life stories, both their own and other prisoners' or non-prisoners'. Recounting life stories gives prisoners the opportunity to share life experiences with others which leads to emotional discharge. Having lightened the emotional burden, prisoners can review and re-evaluate their pre-prison attitudes and life choices more objectively.

According to Stephenson (2007) and Hopwood (1999), the use of storytelling and generally, of literature in prison, helps prisoners improve their self-confidence, work on expression and active listening, develop empathy and improve their communication skills. Findings from two large training programmes, one in the U.S. prisons of Massachusetts entitled "Changing lives through literature" (Trounstine, J., Waxler, R., 1999) and one in British prisons entitled "Stories Connect" (Stephenson, 2007) demonstrate the effectiveness of this educational approach. The basic features of these programmes are narration, discussion, writing and processing various forms of story. For the majority of prisoners who participated in educational activities with

narrative as core, changes in their pre-prison value system were noted.

### **A research in a Greek prison**

This research was part of a narrative workshop held in a Greek prison. The prison is located in the city of Volos (Magnesia prefecture, Central Greece) and its official name is Special Juvenile Detention Centre, Volos. Although prisoners in this jail are formally between the ages of 18 to 21, the actual age of many of them is greater, since, especially for most foreign prisoners, there are no official documents to prove their age.

The research subjects were eight prisoners from Pakistan, who arrived in Greece as economic migrants. They were in prison for different reasons and their sentences, depending on the offense they had committed, ranged from several months to several years. These specific prisoners accepted the teacher's invitation to participate in the narrative workshop and thus the research. Of the eight prisoners five were beginners in learning the Greek language, while three were at an intermediate level in spoken Greek. The latter served as translators for the former.

The narrative workshop became part of the Greek language course for prisoners who were at the prison school. The design and implementation of the workshop was based on the principles of adult education. In particular, all activities of the workshop had as their reference point the learners' experiences. All teaching methods used were standard techniques of adult education such as group work, discussion, brainstorming and case study, while the teacher had the role of coordinator of the educational process.

The main axis of the workshop was the autobiographical narratives of the students and discussion about them. In addition to the narratives of the prisoners themselves, written narratives of others were used (immigrants, ex-prisoners and others) whose stories had elements in common with those of the participants in the workshop. The workshop was completed in ten sessions, where each session lasted approximately one and a half to two hours. The central question of the research focused on whether a narrative workshop, whose design was based on the principles of adult education, could mobilize the critical reflection of the prisoners and be a transformative learning process for the participants.

The research tools used were a group interview with the research subjects at the start and at the completion of the workshop and the research diary of the teacher. The original research design had intended the use of another researcher in the role of critical friend/observer/evaluator. However, the second researcher did not participate as they were unable to secure an entry pass into the prison.

It was not possible to record the interviews with the prisoners as it is forbidden to take recording equipment into the prison. The researcher attempted to record the words of the research subjects in his diary with the greatest possible accuracy. However, as can be expected in these cases, only a small part of both the learners' narratives and views could be recorded. The ban on the use of tape recorders, the limited research time, as well as various external factors affecting the research process are common difficulties in carrying out research in prisons and are systematically recorded by researchers working in similar places (Page, 2009).

The whole research process had an ethnographic approach and was an action-research, since the teacher/researcher coordinated the process, but also participated in it as a team member. Nevertheless, sometimes some of the characteristics of the researcher's identity appeared to function as a boundary for the students. The researcher/teacher was from the outside world, was significantly older and belonged

to the dominant ethno-cultural group unlike the learners who were all self-declared minors and foreigners. The phrase "you cannot understand us" was heard several times and sometimes inhibited teacher-learner communication.

The central core of the storytelling workshop was autobiographical narratives by the group members. During the workshop these narratives had a spiral development. At the start, there were specific topics for developing narratives; these were life in the country of origin, the decision to emigrate, the migrant journey, arrest and detention. As the meetings progressed, so did the stories, both in scope and depth. The narrators first approached subjects beyond their predetermined narrative axes and then entered into more and more detailed narrative, revealing information and events for the first time to other group members.

Crossovers between narratives were very common. The recollection of one member brought to mind a similar incident from another member. This often resulted in the creation of a chain of narratives, where the end of one was the beginning of another. In this way each narrative had a ripple effect. This led not only to the creation of new narratives, but also to a series of reflections by narrators which were often accompanied by intense emotional expression. Joy, sadness, homesickness, extreme or mild anger were the most frequent feelings expressed during the narratives or discussion around them. According to Calderwood (2003) adult learners' emotions and their discharge is a key feature of the group process in adult education and requires appropriate handling by the teacher so as not to lose control of the situation. Given the particular psychological condition of learners when they are prisoners, emotion management by the teacher is a necessary but difficult process.

### **Research findings**

There were five areas where transformations were identified in the prisoners' views. These were their relation to education, their decision about migration, their migrant identity, delinquency, imprisonment and finally, their plans and intentions for the future. Regarding the group members' relation to education, in the group interview held at the start of the workshop, all students expressed negative experiences regarding their formal education. According to the eight students: two had attended high school; two junior high school; three had completed primary school, and one had not attended school, though he was not illiterate. In the formal education system, the group members cited the negative attitude of teachers or peers, their own inability to attend regularly due to work commitments, and also to their own personal choices. Indicative are the following excerpts from their opinions, as recorded in the research log:

*"In Pakistan the school is beatings, beatings, just beatings" [Makes a beating motion with his hand]. / "I argued with a child and I left school" / "The teachers there are not good" / "We worked every day" / "I did not like school, all day reading and writing"*

The group members' negative experiences of formal education had established as the dominant view that any educational process is negative and a waste of time. They said that:

*"School is for those who have money. If you don't have money, you go to work, not school" / "I do not want [the teacher] to be swearing at me and telling me off for not reading or writing"*

In the group interview which happened at the end of the workshop and functioned as an assessment of the workshop, the theme of education was re-discussed. The students' comments show that a formal educational process like the workshop they had participated in, is not for them a formal kind of education. However, it is a desirable way of teaching and learning because of the different role of the teacher and the different teaching techniques. The following views express this:

*“School's like this: homework, beatings, punishment.” / “Here we have discussions all the time. At school there's not much discussion”/ “At school, the teacher talks all the time, the student [Covers his mouth with his hand]”/ “This was like being with friends, no shouting, just chatting” / “If school was like that, I'd be in university now”*

On the issue of migration and migrant identity, it is evident from the very first discussion that these form the core reflection for group members. Characteristic views such as:

*“If I had known what would happen, I wouldn't have left.” / “We did not know what it is to be away from family.” / “Those who left before me just lied saying everything was fine”*

The majority of the group seems to have regretted the decision to emigrate, but continue to understand what lead them to such a decision:

*“People are dying of hunger there and they say there is no place worse than there” / “ When you do not have a job, you have no food. You leave to find work, to have food”*

As the workshop meetings progressed and the narratives about the migration journey and life in a new country multiplied, the majority of the group seems to have crystallized a negative view on their decision to emigrate. So, when a group member expresses the view *“better to eat half a loaf in your own land than ten loaves in a strange land”* the other members agree totally. In the context of this debate, the exchange of views takes on a strong political dimension making connections with colonialism, the problematic governance of their country of origin, the lack of representation of all social groups in governmental institutions etc. Indicative are the views:

*“The English did a lot of bad. The English became rich from Pakistan, Pakistanis starved” / “People are hungry, but they, the government, give all the money to their friends” / “No poor person ever entered government”*

These views highlight the research subjects' development of critical reflection and the transition from the initial individualized approaches to migration towards a deeper examination of its political and social causes.

Regarding the issue of delinquent behavior that led them to prison, during the initial interview, six of the eight prisoners admitted their delinquency. However, they regarded their sentence and imprisonment unfair. Two detainees claimed that they had no connection to the offense for which they were accused. The first six prisoners



focused on the difference between the laws in their home country and in Greece. They said that:

*“In Pakistan you go to prison for one month, here it's for years”/ “I did not know what the law says, one law in Europe, another in Pakistan”*

During the workshop, the participants, including the six, developed reflective opinions about the causes that led to their delinquent attitudes.

The narrative of a prisoner, who had stayed in prison longer than the others acted as an incentive for reflective discussion. This particular prisoner stated:

*“It was bad luck. The evil thought came into my mind [puts his finger on his temple] to do the robbery. I had been on the road one month, if I go to jail, that would be good. But this was bad thinking”.*

Similarly, other group members stated:

*“I did it back to front. First I acted and then I thought about it” / “The brain doesn't always work well. You do one thing, and then say I shouldn't have done it, it was a bad thing”*

Also important are the thoughts that members of the group express on prisoner attitude and prison life. In the initial interview almost all agree that *“in prison the toughest wins”* and *“in prison if you cry you're done for”*. However, by the end of the workshop, and having narrated a significant number of incidents from everyday life in jail, the participants' views differed from their initial ones. The following illustrate this:

*“I don't argue, I have lots of discussions, I play a lot of football.”/ “When someone says something bad, I don't fight, I just say ‘you're right, that's it for now” / “I pray a lot, five times a day and I say, if Allah wills, I will leave here”*

There were also changes in the views expressed by prisoners in the initial interview and their concerns at the end of the workshop about their intentions for what to do after you get out of jail, The views of seven of the eight prisoners in the initial interview may be summarized in the phrase: *“I will try to leave Greece and go to another country (England, Norway, Canada)”*. One prisoner who did not agree with this view and stated: *“I will try to stay in Greece , otherwise I will go back to Pakistan”*, made frequent references to information he received from his friends who are in other European countries. Typical is the following extract from his narrative, as recorded in the research log: *“I called a friend who is in Italy and he told me . Don't come. It's very difficult. There's no work, nothing. In Greece it's better”*. The issue of residence in Greece or moving to another country after completion of their sentence is of serious concern and reoccurs with great frequency throughout the narratives. The prisoners' opinions are affected by narratives heard both in the workshop and at other times in the prison. When the same subject is discussed at the last workshop meeting, of the eight prisoners, only three persist in the original view of moving to another country. The rest are very concerned and they seem undecided:

*“I do not know what to do”/ “I’ll talk to friends and see”/ “If I find a job I will stay in Greece” / “I might go back”*

### **Conclusions**

This study sought to investigate whether the involvement of prisoners in a storytelling workshop held within a prison and designed according to the principles of adult education could stimulate a thinking, reflective process in the context of transformative learning. It was found that the oral narratives of the group members and written narratives selected from other storytellers, served as disorienting dilemmas which mobilized the thoughts and reflections of the prisoners on a range of subjects. The themes of the narratives, with a spiral development, were their relation to education, their decision about migration, their migrant identity, prison identity and finally, their plans for the future. Given the negative relation they had with formal education in their home country and their rejection of the educational process, their participation in this workshop also served as a disorienting dilemma. Participating in the workshop, the prisoners realized that there may be another approach to education that meets their needs and desires and in which they can play an active role.

The narratives during the workshop help group members to reassess the decision to migrate and to choose a migrant identity. However, they seem mostly to prompt reflections on the reasons for continued poverty in their country and the large number of immigrants to Europe. Along with discussions, the narratives also help develop the critical reflection of prisoners and the gradual development of an emancipatory perspective. Changes occur in the group members' relation to the prisoner identity and the prison routine. The dominant view in prison - “the toughest wins ” gradually give way to views that focus on communication between the prisoners, on contemplation and the role of prayer. Finally, changes occur during the workshop about the prisoners' plans after their release. Their initial certainty “will go to another country” gives way to uncertainties like “do not know”, “will see” etc.

Obviously, it cannot be said with certainty that the observed changes in the views of the members of the group, from its beginning to its completion, are solely as a result of the workshop. According to Hopwood (1999) narrations and discussions are a key feature of the everyday communication of prisoners and therefore narrators and listeners are influenced throughout their time in prison.

However, irrespective of other factors likely to affect the prisoners and lead to a transformation of previous perceptions, their participation in the workshop was a catalyst after being given the opportunity to freely express their opinions, to systematically and repeatedly reflect on opinions different from their own, to reassess choices they had made in the past and plans made for the future . The use of the group workshop as a teaching tool and other techniques of adult learning, such as discussion, brainstorming and the use of a case study in conjunction with the systematic use of narratives were particularly helpful for prisoners. These techniques maintained the interest of the learners and ensured active participation in the educational process. The gradual establishment of a climate of trust between the members themselves and between the teacher and the members was also particularly important. Although the creation of a climate of communication, cooperation and interaction is a key element in any educational activity relating to adults, Warner (2007) highlights the critical role of such a climate in educational activities in prisons. Given that trust between prisoners is not self-evident in prisons, securing a climate of mutual trust is a prerequisite for the success of educational activities in prison.

Obviously a narrative workshop, as described above cannot influence the social

structures that create delinquency. However, evident in this research is the fact that it can mobilize prisoners' contemplation and reflection so they reconsider the course of their lives and re-evaluate the decisions that led to delinquent behavior. The above process has the characteristics of a transformational journey which according to Warner (2002) should be the ultimate goal of any educational activity conducted in a prison. At the same time it is a transformative process for the teacher/ researcher, as the daily experience of teaching in prison apart from the barrage of reflections on issues of education and correction, helps them realize and feel the importance of personal freedom. As Swift (2002) characteristically says, in prison you learn "what it means to leave the world and then be allowed to return".

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## **Learning “otherwise”. A Case Study about educational Exclusions, Refugee Experience and Transformative Processes**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the contribution of the refugee experience as a learning process different from conventional learning paths which leads each subject to the respective underlying versions of Formal and Informal Education.

### **Introduction**

This study examines how the refugee experience, the experience of borderline states which acts as a kind of Informal Education, may lead the refugee subject to internal transformation. In this way, old problematic frames of reference as well as wider views and mental habits are transformed. The study is part of broader research, which was conducted as part of a thesis on the Postgraduate Study Programme “Adult Education” of the Greek Open University and which investigated the function of the refugee experience as a possible transformative learning process.

The research target group was 15 young male Afghan asylum seekers staying at the reception centre for unaccompanied minors in Makrinitisa, a village on mount Pilion in central Greece. The reception centre operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. The Association for the Social Support of Youth (Arsis) has been responsible for its operation since 2005 and has been funded by the European Refugee Fund since 2009 (<http://arsis.gr>).

It uses the biographical method which because of its inherent characteristics of orality, immediacy and plasticity presents important positive characteristics. As far as the researcher is concerned, it gives access to vulnerable social processes, which are extremely difficult to approach by means of traditional statistical or quantitative methods. It also facilitates access to sensitive social phenomena and events, mainly when there is a marked lack of written (historical) sources as is partly the case in the present study. Here, almost inevitably, the reconstitution of the past occurs, orally. Storytelling preserves scarce and rich sociological and historical material which offers the possibility to gain nascent knowledge about the research field and to listen in situ to aspects of the research approach. A two way, interactive relationship is developed with the narrator and thus is enriched emotionally. (Bertaux, 1980: 197-225; Bertaux & Kohli, 1984: 215-237; Savvakis, 2012: 8-9). As regards the subjects under investigation, the biographical method is for them of major importance. These people often belong to oppressed groups but here their voices are heard and they become visible. Their approach is holistic and their emergence is as a subjective entity and not as a fragmented being. Storytelling, indirectly, has also a therapeutic dimension. The narrator's self-image is reconstituted as they tell their story as if in a performative way of reconstructing their life. The possibility to reflect critically through a deep narrative confession may lead to transformative learning (Bertaux, 1974: 329-362; Bertaux, 1980: 197-225; Bertaux & Kohli, 1984: 215-237; Ochs & Capps, 1996: 19-43; Brannen, 2013; Savvakis, 2012: 8-9; Karpiak, 2003: 99-116; Ruppert Johnson, 2003: 227-244). As regards the actual research process, the biographical method is considered to have a positive contribution to the democratization of history, the politicization of social process and by extension, the awakening of social

consciousness, with the emergence of subjects who until recently were excluded from the historical narrative (Thompson, 1980: 249-268; Heinritz & Rammstedt, 1991: 331-370; Savvakis, 2012: 9).

Of particular importance is the possibility of incorporating the biographies of the actors/narrators into a particular historical and sociological frame of reference with a view to strengthening interdisciplinarity and the multi-methodological approach. For this reason, in the present study, as well as the use of the narrators' stories, official reports from international organizations, non-governmental organizations and other institutions are used. These present a socio-political and historical context of the countries where the individual stories of the Afghan refugees took place – in Afghanistan and in the host countries (Iran and Greece / European Union).

The research took place in three staggered phases: a) October-November 2012, b) February 2013, and c) March-April 2013. An Iranian doctor took the role of interpreter from the mother tongue of the narrators Dari and/or Farsi to Greek and vice versa. Use of interpretation because of the lack of a lingua franca was necessary and the narrators' words are doubly interpreted (on a first level, by the interpreter, and on a second by the authors). However, this double interpretation is, in this case, the only possible way for the refugee subjects to articulate themselves and make visible their presence in contemporary society.

The present study, traversing the formal and non-formal educational paths of the biographies of the refugees, both in their home country (Afghanistan) and the country of their first long-term refugee experience (Iran) and the new host country (Greece) focuses on the barriers of access for them to the educational process. The vast majority of the narrators are purely or functionally illiterate, and therefore, in a first phase, less able to take the initiative to improve their personal lives. With their substantive exclusion from formal and non-formal education in these countries, informal education, in this case, the version of the refugee's –often– traumatic experience is what constitutes a vast and multidimensional learning context, starting from the creation of basic disorientating experiences. These disorienting experiences are a potential for internal transformational processes in the refugee subjects, starting with the revaluation of arguments that support dysfunctional frames of reference. Thus, these may be eliminated and partly replaced by new, more open and reflective frames of references contributing to processes for the subjects' transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000: 3-33).

In the present study, however, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is applied doubly differentiated. First, Mezirow (2000: 15; 2003: 60) considers that the condition for the subjects' inner transformation is, on the one hand, a sense of security and democracy in their social environment, and, on the other hand, their having the characteristics of maturity, of education, of economic security and emotional intelligence. In contrast, difficult social conditions, such as hunger and lack of stable housing, or difficult emotional states, such as despair and fear, are considered impediments to an individual's reflective understanding of experiences and thus are impediments to their transformation. However, according to critical theory, transformative (in its holistic sense) may be learning also in marginalized groups. Starting from disorienting dilemmas in their lives, a capacity for internal change is developed which also imparts energy to society and its existing social relations. This was demonstrated by Bridwell (2013: 127-146) in her empirical study of homeless African American women. Moreover, for Mezirow (2003: 62), transformative learning is consistent only with adulthood, as at this stage, qualities of critical thinking and the critical dialogue and willingness for inner transformation are developed. In this study,

the subjects under investigation are formally considered minors in Western society. However, the concept of childhood and child age are Western social constructs, neither timeless nor global. The experiences of these narrators, despite their young biological age, have contributed to their early maturing, so that, from a psycho-spiritual sense, they are more specific to the adult stage of life.

### **1. In Afghanistan: theocracy and secular education, two incompatible concepts**

*“In Afghanistan, I only went to the Koran School for two years. A teacher read us the Koran, in Arabic and not in our language, so we did not understand much. We only learnt about Allah and how to be good Muslims, but nothing about the world. So I did not learn how to read and write, or other things that would help me to make it in life.”* (Excerpt from MV's narrative).

During the Taliban rule (1996-2001), but continuing mainly in southern Afghanistan, where the Taliban and extreme conservative groups continue to have effective control over large areas, the theocratic orientation of Afghan society transforms schools essentially into propagators of religious fanaticism. It rejects even the basic educational process, in the sense of general learning, as a secular process and hence anti-religious. Add to this fact, there is increased poverty in the majority of the Afghan population. The latter contributes to the increase of child labor, which serves as a major stumbling block for one of the basic rights of children, that of unobstructed education, as indicated in the following testimony:

*“My father was killed in the war. I grew up with my mother and two younger brothers. [...] I had many agricultural jobs, in the fields, and with the money I earned from a very young age, I helped my mother to raise us. [...] In Afghanistan, I didn't go to school. I went for two years to the Koran School. [...] I was not the only one who couldn't go to a regular school. [...] Most children (in Afghanistan) are forced to do the most difficult and often very dangerous jobs, to support themselves and their families. [...] Education is considered a luxury, especially for girls. But it's not considered useful for boys either.”* (Excerpt from MG's narrative).

Indeed, the vast majority of all Afghan children have no access to education. The adult literacy rate is only 28% (AI, 2010), while the rate of illiteracy among women and girls is 85%. This is due mainly to widespread gender discrimination, based on old traditions and social practices of the country, family poverty, lack of security and lack of schools for girls (AIHRC, 2006). Furthermore, forced child labor belongs to the social reality of Afghanistan, despite the country having signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1994. A large number of Afghan children are forced into hard manual work of 9-15 hours a day, in the carpet industry, in agriculture, in heavy vehicle repair and metal projects and activities related to the cultivation, production and trafficking of drugs, which is particularly booming in the country (UNODC, 2012; AREU, 2013a; AREU, 2013b; IWPR, 2012).

Also, the number of street children and those used for begging is increasing. Because of their weak social position, working children are more exposed to dangers, which include all forms of physical, sexual and psychological abuse. The inaccessibility of quality education to working children implies the dangerous emergence of an uneducated new generation with no trades or professions. Moreover, there is the critical relationship of child labor, among other things, to drug addiction, kidnapping and trafficking, crime and delinquency. According to law in Afghanistan, fourteen years old is the minimum age requirement for employment of a child with a 35 hour working week. From age 13, work is legal only if the job has an educational purpose. However, working children in Afghanistan are usually 6-18 years old, and sometimes

even younger (4-5 years). Surveys show that almost 96 % of children work because of poverty and lack of family care and protection (AIHRC, 2006: 3-19).

In urban areas, overpopulation, unemployment and lack of social security make children more vulnerable than adults, although children in urban areas enjoy greater opportunities in terms of access to education and health than children in rural areas, because usually, urban families give priority to the education of their children. The number of schools and educational facilities is not commensurate with the needs. Moreover, the high rate of illiteracy, particularly among mothers, condemns parents to an unclear vision of how to raise their children (AIHRC, 2008: 3).

## **2. In Iran: social and educational exclusion of Afghan refugee children**

The general adverse living conditions in Afghanistan (UNHCR, 2010; UNHCR, 2013b), have lead many Afghans, in recent decades to flee to neighboring countries, especially Iran and Pakistan (IRBC, 1991). The vast majority of narrators had long-term refugee experiences in Iran, where according to the UNHCR (2013a) approximately 800,000 Afghan refugees live today, many of them in difficult socio-economic conditions.

The narrators, referred extensively to the difficulties encountered in the first host country; the bureaucratic difficulties experienced due to the difficult issuance of a residence permit placed them on the margins of society.

*“In Iran, when we did not have papers, the police caught us, and if we didn't pay a lot of money, which we didn't have, they loaded us up and sent us back to Afghanistan. In two years, they caught my father six times and kicked him out. He'd just pass the border into Afghanistan, and then after a short while he'd cross back into Iran and secretly come and find us. The truth is that in Iran they didn't want us, and that's why they were always after us and getting money from us.”* (Excerpt from MM's narrative).

The narrators, living as child refugees in Iran, or rather on the margins of Iranian society, were excluded from official state education, despite a few exceptions (Faramarzi, 2013). The reason was not only because of a (frequent) lack of formal residence permits and other bureaucratic papers. More importantly, because of the discrimination that existed, refugee children, often, even if they met bureaucratic standards for enrollment at a school in the host country, usually had a separate school system, where the “local” students enrolled in Iranian schools and Afghan refugee students attended purely Afghan schools. This is the case, at least, when they were not forced to discontinue their studies for work reasons:

*“In Iran there was a separate school for us children of Afghanistan. We could go and learn basic things there. But I did not go because I was working in a carpet factory twelve hours a day every day and sometimes more. [...] It was basically me who supported my mother and my two younger siblings. [...] And that's why I never learned to read and write well.”* (Excerpt from MG's narrative).

But even in the few cases that Afghan students were enrolled in Iranian schools, they suffered the ridicule of their classmates and their teachers, living in marginalized and stigmatized by stereotypically oversimplified generalizations – mental constructions in the collective imaginary of the hegemonic culture:

*“Most of the time they didn't let us go to the schools in Iran. They put us in separate schools for refugees. And when we went to Iranian schools, it wasn't good. The local children mocked us, saying we were poor and dirty. And the teachers put us in front of the class and showed us to the other kids saying that we knew nothing; we had no culture; we neither loved art nor the written word.”* (Excerpt from AL's narrative).



In this particular excerpt, more is expressed than the general stereotypes about poverty and dirtiness, which form part of the general repertoire of rhetoric against many minority groups. There is a voice that reflects the positive self-image that the Iranian people have of themselves as shareholders in and worthy descendants of the ancient Persian culture. They are deeply cultured and brilliant performers in the arts and literature, whereas the foreigners are ignorant and uncultured. The finger is pointed at them and they are placed in the centre of the class where they are visible to all. This ritual of exposing has dimensions of intimidation, threats, contempt or even punishment, since, according to Foucault (1989: 237), *“with the word punishment we mean anything that is able to make children feel the error they have committed, anything that is capable of humiliating them, of embarrassing them: ... a certain coldness, a certain indifference, any kind of question, a humiliation, the demolition of some place.”* In other words, a “microphysics of power”, where it is absolutely clear who dominates and who is dominated.

In this way the narrators were excluded, often, either due to bureaucracy or because of forced labor, from formal and non-formal education. This sui generis part of everyday lived experience (a kind of informal learning), contributed to the formation of a framework that would lead the research subjects to a new refugee decision.

### **3. In Greece: social and educational re-exclusion of Afghan asylum-seekers**

Having decided to leave Iran because of unfavorable social conditions, the Afghan narrators look to the European continent for more humane living conditions and in theory at least fairer management of social goods. They take on the risk of a long and dangerous journey, during which, according to the testimony of AA *“reaching your destination alive is not always possible”*. Greece, forming the southeastern gateway to the European Union, is considered a passage and not the end of the refugee journey. However, often, due to arrest by the Greek authorities or due to financial inability to continue on the refugee route to the countries of Central and Northern Europe which are the final destinations of migrant subjects, they remain in Greece, some indeed for a long time.

Due to their “unlawful” entry into the country, many are those who arrive in Athens seeking a support network of fellow nationals. This is initially for housing, usually in the form of sub-letting space for large numbers of people of the same social and political status. According to the narrators, it is a kind of voluntary self-incarceration and positioning of oneself on the margins of the host society, because of their fear at an institutional and social level. In other words, because of the persecution they experienced from both the Greek authorities and racist right-wing members of Greek society:

*“In Athens, I stayed locked up in the flat all day. I did not dare to go out; maybe the police would arrest me and put me in jail. I had heard about the fascists as well, who, if they see a foreigner, kill you, so I never went out at all. And then I thought, and what difference has it made now that I’ve arrived in Europe? They’re after me here, just like they were in Iran. Nothing’s changed...”* (Excerpt from AM’s narrative).

Even in cases where the narrators had received temporary residence permits in Greece, their daily survival was what occupied all their thoughts:

*“(In Athens) to pay the rent where we were staying with other Afghans, we had a pushchair and we went out every day looking through rubbish for metal objects, cans of refreshments and other. There was an Afghan who took it, gave it for recycling and we got paid by the piece. We did this work every morning, from waking till noon then we went to a Greek church that gave us lunch. Then we went home and left our*

*mother to rest. From about three o'clock until it started getting dark we searched in the rubbish again. When it began to get dark, we went home again, because it was dangerous and we were scared. This went on every day, for many months, until my mother found a trafficker and left for Germany, my brother got caught by the police and locked up for half a year in a prison in Komotini and they brought me here.”* (Excerpt from TN's narrative).

Under such living conditions, their inclusion in any kind of formal or non-formal education in the new host country seems rather utopian. Only if with the help, usually of an NGO and official bodies for refugees, do they manage to submit an official request for asylum in the country and thus obtain a temporary residence permit and temporarily acquire legal status. This gives them access to some forms of non-formal education. For example, narrators who stay at the Reception Centre in Makrinitisa, automatically become recipients of the services offered. Specifically, this Centre gives emphasis to the model of cultural adaptation of refugees (Lanphier, 1983: 4-33). As well as housing services, legal assistance to deal with administrative and legal procedures and psychosocial empowerment that it provides, it offers educational support. This includes foreign language lessons such as English and French, through language courses which take place at the centre, and Modern Greek as a foreign language, at the centre and at night school in Volos (<http://arsis.gr>). Thus, according to testimonies of some narrators, they are given a second chance at learning in their lives:

*“Whatever lesson takes place here (Reception Centre) I go to it. I want to learn what I haven't been able to learn up until now and make up for time lost.”* (Excerpt from TN's narrative).

However, most narrators agree that essentially they are also marginalized in the official Greek educational system:

*“They have us all separate us from the others (students). Not only in a separate class but in a separate school. [...] While all the Greeks go to school in the morning, which is better for the self-concentration, we have to go at night, which is not a good time for a lesson. [...] We do not know the language, and in the classroom, there is no-one that knows it well so that we can learn. [...] I do not understand anything, so I just go, because I have nothing else to do.”* (Excerpt from MA's narrative).

The educational marginalization clearly stems from the social marginalization. That at least is how it is perceived and experienced by the narrators:

*“I feel that the Greeks do not want us, otherwise, they wouldn't have separated us to live and learn elsewhere.”* (Excerpt from the AA's narrative).

#### **4. Learning “otherwise”. The refugee experience as an informal transformative process**

The social re-exclusion of the Afghan narrators in Greece creates new obstacles in their learning process, at least in conventional versions of formal and non-formal learning. This had happened before in Afghanistan and Iran. Such exclusion, however, both in its general form, that of social exclusion, and that of educational exclusion is often a disorienting experience for refugee subjects which causes them to re-evaluate old weak frames of reference and replace them with new more flexible and transformational ones:

*“In Afghanistan I learned that children had to help their family and because of that, it is more important to work than to go to school. [...] And in Iran, that's what I thought, because most refugee children are forced to work. [...] In Europe I see that things are different. Children go to school for many years and learn many things. [...] The family*

*helps them and not the other way round. And that is the way it should be.*” (Excerpt from MG’s narrative).

The narrators realize the gap between their (often traumatic) educational experiences and the desired experiences which could be achieved if goals are set and efforts are made. This realization comes from their comparing the two worlds of East and West. Their approach is a compact and homogenized construct, formed through imagination and abstract thought. The new dynamic perception of self, due to the realization of many refugee goals is a counterweight to an earlier view of the self as uneducated and –therefore– unable to self-improve socially and personally. It is much more than the replacement of old dysfunctional frames of reference with new more open and flexible ones. It is an inner transformation regarding opinions and more broadly mental habits, mainly in the way they view themselves.

*“I think about how hard it was for me at school. [...] The local kids (ie from Iran) hurt me a lot. They mocked me and they kept calling me “fatty Afghan”, because I was 120 kilos. [...] And the teachers, most of the time, were rude to us and so I was not interested at all in school and I had no goals, as children learn here. [...] Since I made the decision to make the difficult journey to Europe, I’ve learned things that you do not learn in regular school. [...] I learned to set my own goals and realize them. [...] I saw that I who, until then, was an uneducated and incompetent guy, made this whole journey and I learned many things from mixing with people, good and bad. [...] And now I have learned that when I set goals, I can achieve them.”* (Excerpt from AA’s narrative).

The testimonies of most of the narrators fit within this framework of accurate goal setting for, initially, self-improvement and then improvement at a collective level together with the commitment to undertake social action. These narrators have understood the value of formal and non-formal education and they want and aim to free themselves of social marginalization and join the formal education system. They hope this will give them a future knowledge base and the required certificates, which will give them access to employment, thus helping to improve both their own lives and their wider social environment:

*“I want to make up for lost time and to learn what I should have learned by now. [...] I definitely want to learn the language of the country where I will ultimately live, so that I can study at university. So, I can help myself, my family and become useful and important for society.”* (Excerpt from MG’s narrative).

## **5. Concluding summary**

For these new Afghan asylum- seekers in Greece, the refugee experience as a borderline state experience emerges as a specific kind of learning. They are unable to benefit from the virtually nonexistent or, at best, dysfunctional educational system of their country of origin, and unable to get into the education and more broadly, the social system of the host country, the intermediate refugee station, Iran, and then Greece, the gateway of South-East Europe. They are obliged to conform to the conservative theocratic orientation of education in their country of origin, and submit without any possibility for resistance to the brainwashing. Abandoning even the most elementary education in order to support their families through child labor, physically and mentally painful and often dangerous, becomes accepted as normal both in the country of origin and the country of their intermediate refugee stay (Iran). They comply with the effective exclusion from the formal education system of the new host country (Greece).

While obviously lacking in terms of formal and non-formal learning process, this

long-term social exclusion is a basic, though not unique catalyst to create a framework for a different kind of learning. Through the long refugee trek, including persecution, economic exploitation, inhumane social living conditions and various exclusions including educational, disorienting dilemmas occur. These lead to a re-evaluation and replacement of old dysfunctional frames of reference with new more reflective and critical ones. Thus, the extremely conservative, theocratic education in the country of origin is criticized not only as non-useful for the functioning of the individual in more anthropocentric environments but also incompatible with the concepts of democracy and freedom, that education should cultivate. Moreover, the perceived inter-relation of the fourfold child-family-education-work structure changes. Initially, the abandonment of a child's education for employment purposes in order to support their family belonged on the mental horizon of the Afghan narrator. This then changes to a diametrically opposite mental habit: the obligation of the family to ensure the right of children and young people to learning.

More importantly, many, though not all, refugee subjects through the refugee experience, begin to acquire a different self-concept. Becoming aware that although uneducated, they have managed to overcome many of the adversities that the refugee experience entails, they re-evaluate themselves in a more dynamic light, ridding themselves of the passive victim role where others decide for them. They note that through the refugee experience they have informally developed and learned many important social, emotional and cognitive skills that are a successful counterbalance to their nonexistent formal and non-formal education. However, they note the necessity of the latter two forms of education especially in their western host society. They feel that the background knowledge available and the certificates awarded will be the vehicle to improve themselves both individually and collectively, with their initiatives and action for a more equitable distribution of social goods.

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## **Literacy and Transformative Learning: Individual Views and Experiences**

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### **Abstract**

The paper presents an analysis of learning processes made possible through literacy. The focus is the interpretation of qualitative empirical data concerning the individual use of reading and writing, focusing on individual experiences.

### **Introduction**

Looking at transformative learning research, different topics and fields have been tackled, ranging from individual learning experiences concerning personal experiences, everyday life, as well as work life to organizational learning. Theoretically, Mezirow's idea of transformative learning draws on different theoretical frameworks or concepts in order to explain outcomes of transformative learning processes. Among others, Mezirow referred to Paulo Freire's concept "pedagogy of the oppressed", especially pointing out the idea of individual and collective emancipation through learning. Freire's starting point was offering literacy-classes in poor, undereducated communities. In this context the question of literacy and the power people are able to develop once they became literate has been described and discussed widely. It seems to be accepted and common knowledge, that being literate leads to self-confidence, personal freedom, political participation, economic stability, and so on.

The following paper will discuss the impact of literacy on individual learning processes, considering not only illiterate people who became literate as adults, but also people who learned how to read and write in their childhood. Focusing in the question why and how being able to read and write influenced their life and whether individual transformative learning process can be detected because of this ability.

The paper will refer to an understanding of literacy as social practice, which, according to the Brian Street, surpasses the restricted idea of literacy as a functional skill (Street 1993). In this traditional, culturally embedded concept, literacy – or illiteracy – is closely connected to implications like inclusion or exclusion from economic life or social and political participation. Whereas in the concept of literacy as social practice, different individual approaches to literacy are appreciated in their subjective and social significance.

The paper will first be using the theoretical framework of critical adult education in order to ask whether and how literacy supports the development of an emancipated, critically thinking human being, which is able to act adequately in a democratic society.

Second, the recently by Knud Illeris' (2014) developed multi-layer-model of transformative learning will be used as an analytical tool. The interviews will be looked at in view of possible transformational processes concerning the layers Illeris proposes: core identity, personality layer, preference layer.

The concept, which was derived from different models on identity and identity-development, seems to be valuable for in-depth analysis of transformative learning processes. However, mainly referring to identity development and/or change as being the aim and also the result of transformative learning, no hints are given concerning the expected outcome. Therefore, the paper suggests critical adult education as a

theoretical framework. This indicates which possible results of the learning processes could be looked for and how they could be interpreted. Concerning the understanding of individual concepts of literacy, the reinterpretation using critical adult education theory and transformative learning theory, an additional result will be a deeper insight in the individual learning processes which take place while acquiring literary skills, including new aesthetic experiences and reflectivity.

## **1. Literacy as social practice and critical adult education: theoretical framework**

### *1.1 Literacy as Social Practice*

The ongoing discussion on literacy has been intense as well as controversial. After the Second World War, when modernization processes influenced societies politically as well as economically, the literacy became more and more important. Since then, the value of literacy has been discussed with regard to different objectives and outcomes:

- *Humanistic value:* social and political participation, equality, reconstruction after conflicts
- *Cultural value:* cultural diversity as well as progressive cultural change
- *Social value:* education, health, reproduction, gender equality
- *Economic value:* private and societal rate of return (Lenhart 2010, p. 610-611).

While in the beginning literacy foremost described reading and writing skills and the level someone was able to perform, today's concepts of literacy aim at defining necessary "life skills", a person should be able to perform. Basically, this refers to reading, writing, and numeracy, but also includes specialized knowledge and skills like computer literacy, media literacy, political literacy and so on (Lenhart 2010, p. 599).

While political discussions about literacy usually stress the expected positive outcome for individuals and societies, the economic outcome as well as chances of political and social participation and inclusion, the scientific community discusses the aims and outcomes of literacy more critically. Theory on literacy, literacy studies, and literacy research as complementary fields shaped the debates on literacy. One strand of discussion, initiated by the British sociologist Brian Street in the 1980s, refers to Critical Theory as theoretical framework and discusses the deduction that literary skills lead to economic growth and/or political participation critically (Street 2003, 77). He argues that literacy can be differentiated in two models, the *autonomous model* and the *ideological model* (Street 2003). While the autonomous model refers to the idea of "functional literacy", which describes the level of reading and writing skills a person should have in a certain society, the ideological model looks at the hidden agenda of literacy.

From Street's point of view, the *autonomous model* refers to literacy as a skill. It stresses the cognitive and technical aspects of learning how to read and write. Literacy as a skill is presented to be neutral and universal (Street/Lefstein 2007, 41). It does not recognize the specific pre-conditions and circumstances of the learners. These concern their educational, social, and economical background, their cultural embeddedness, their points of view on literacy, which have been passed on as social practices by families, communities, educational traditions (Street 2003, 77).

Contrary, the *ideological model* of literacy, criticizes the notion of literacy being skill, which is seemingly neutral and as well as universal. Accordingly, this model incorporates ideological assumptions, which are embedded in socially epistemical principals as well as in overall expectations and meanings. The ideological model

conveys power-relations, world-views and interests of particular groups, it challenges the idea of “proper literacy” (Street 2003, 9).

But while Street focuses on ideological aspects of the model in order to underline its embeddedness in cultures, he also recognizes that “the ideological model [...] does not attempt to deny technical skills or the cognitive aspects of reading and writing, but rather understands them as they are encapsulated within cultural wholes and within structures of power. In this sense the ‘ideological’ model subsumes rather than excludes the work undertaken within the ‘autonomous’ model” (Street 2003, 9).

Street and others developed the concept of “literacy as social practice” in the 1980s. It recognizes the fact, that people are performing literary acts for various subjective reasons. Their individual aims and objectives do not necessarily coincide with a common, culturally and socially embedded understanding of literacy. At least in westernized, modern knowledge-societies, literacy above all is seen as a skill, which everybody should be able to perform. People lacking adequate literary skills face various obstacles, ranging from under- or low paid jobs to social and political exclusion – due to obvious or latent societal practices or to self-induced mechanisms of exclusion.

Literacy as a social practice is defined as “the general cultural ways of utilising written language which people draw upon in the lives” (Barton/Hamilton 1998, 6). To analyze and understand what people are doing when they use literacy and why they are doing it, literary acts are differentiated in *literacy events* and *literacy practices* (Street 2003, 79).

*Literacy events* describe any activity of a person, where literacy plays a role: writing texts, communication via texts or about texts, using texts in order to perform activities, get information through texts etc. Literacy events are observable everyday, regular, often repeated activities, which are carried out individually or collectively (Barton/Hamilton 1998, 7)

*Literacy practices* also describe activities of people using literacy. But the question of meanings and purposes of using literacy, the historical, social, and cultural embeddedness of these practices, the influences of institutions and power relationships involved plays an important role in explaining literacy practices. Literacy practices are, as social practices, shaped by social rules. “Literacy practices are more usefully understood as existing in the relations between people, within groups and communities, rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals” (Barton/Hamilton 1998, 7). Literacy practices are fluid and dynamic, they change in times, cultural and historical settings, they are changed by society and they are changing societies.

If literacy is understood in terms of the ideological model, the acquisition of literacy concerns not only skills and technical use, but conditions, meanings and contexts in which literacy as social practice is used are discussed. The model also asks how individuals use literacy and how it shapes and eventually changes their identity. This does not only tackle questions of learning but also of education, of inclusion and exclusion, of self-awareness and reflection. Mary Hamilton defines a functionally oriented discourse of literacy as well as an emancipatory discourse. Literacy becomes “a means of emancipation, enabling people to control their lives, challenge injustice and become autonomous, participating citizens in a democracy” (Hamilton 2010, 8).

## 1.2 Critical Educational Theory

If one objective of literacy is individual and collective emancipation, one can also ask about the role of education within the context of acquiring literacy skills as well as



becoming educated through literacy. Both processes are two sides of a coin. It also means, that teaching literacy has to be based on critical emancipatory educational theory. Critical theory seeks to explain societies, referring to their historical specificity as well as the fact, that societal values, norms and structures are man-made and therefore due to change.

The focus is the development of the human being as an independent, autonomous, emancipated person who is able to think and reflect critically, in order to become able to act within a democratic society and also to influence and to shape it. To reach these objectives of improvement and inclusion, transformational processes need to take place, individually as well as collectively.

Within the discussion of critical adult education theory, Bildung is seen as a means and at the same time an objective of learning processes in order for adult learners to acquire knowledge, skills, and competences to form their self, their identity. At the same time, Bildung should enable people to critically reflect society, their own role in a society, as well as opportunities and constraints to change its conditions. In the German debate of critical educational theory, this approach is echoed, when for example Prongratz and Bünger define the objectives of Bildung as follows:

- Bildung means competence, critique and judgment
- Bildung aims at the – difficult and at the same time risky – achievement of individual self-constitution
- Therefore, Bildung means to come to terms with the contradictions imposed by society: to become independent as a person while being captured in social constraints (Prongratz & Bünger, 2008, pp. 116-117).

Dimensions such as embeddedness, action, identity, congruency, critical awareness and critical reflection are implicitly included in this definition. For the authors, the aim of Bildung is to be able to influence and change reality. They also claim the right of the individual “to be someone else, to have a right of ‘non’-identity, of difference” (Prongratz & Bünger, 2008, p. 117) from expected role models and behavior.

This definition incorporates the idea of developing one's own identity independently. At the same time, this process implies an ongoing tension between the individual and the lifeworld. To resolve this tension or come to terms with it, individuals need to be involved in a dialogue between the self and the surrounding world, aiming at constantly balancing their identity in accordance to their own expectations and those of their surrounding lifeworld.

## **2. Transformative Learning as Transformation of Identity: Methodological Framework**

Considering the relationship between the concept of literacy as social practice and critical educational theory it becomes clear that aims and objectives are similar. Emancipated human beings should become able to think critically and to analyze conditions and developments, explaining the current situation/status in a society and their own roles within a society. This is accompanied by the development of identity – of the self and of the other. In the concept of literacy as social practice, special attention is paid to the role literacy is playing in developing identity. The culturally assigned values of literacy need to be uncovered in order to understand their relevance in relation to identity development and the ability to act according to expected rules and norms of a society – or to act in opposition to it. But either way, the task always seems to be to come to terms with expectations, those of the society or their own.

Consequently, learning processes have to take place, which, – in reciprocal processes

– shape and reshape the individual as well as society. These learning processes can run smoothly, so that people develop knowledge, competences as well as a well-balanced personality. But they also can be disturbed – by outwardly induced crises as well as by self-reflection. This might lead to further learning processes, which in some cases are characterized as transformative.

„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. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse, to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insights“ (Mezirow, 2012, p. 76).

The Danish adult educator Knud Illeris recently developed a model in order to analyze transformative learning processes. Illeris starts by criticizing the tendency of the multiple and seemingly arbitrary explanations of transformative learning. While from Illeris' point of view Mezirow and others emphasize the cognitive acquisition of knowledge in order to explain the changes meaning perspectives, frame of references and habits of mind of a person (Illeris 2014, 39), he himself focuses on the question how and when transformative learning leads to a profound change of identity.

“The concept of transformative learning comprises all learning that implies change in the identity of the learner” (Illeris 2014, 40).

Illeris stresses the fact that the development of identity is always connected to learning processes, which involve cognitive, emotional and social dimensions (Illeris 2014, 70). The interaction between the individual and the lifeworld, which has to take place in order to develop identity, requires transformative learning.

Illeris model of personal identity consists of three layers: *core identity*, the *personality layer* and the *preference layer* (Illeris 2014, 71). In addition Illeris introduces the aspect of part-identities. They concern areas like work, family, everyday interests, national, cultural, political and religious identity. These part-identities again can be subdivided in the above-mentioned layers, forming a multi-layered identity-model. Illeris points out that a person attaches different degrees of significance to the various part-identities. Therefore changes in one might have more impact on the core-identity than changes in another (Illeris 2014, 75).

### **3. Literacy as Social Practice and its Influence on Identity Development**

The last chapter will present results of a project on literacy as social practice. It was conducted from 2009 to 2011 as an ethnographical study according to the concept literacy as social practice, looking at individual and local practices of literacy in a community/quarter of the City of Hamburg, Altona (Zeuner & Pabst 2011). In the following I present results concerning individual literacy practices. This perspective allows a closer look on the role literacy plays in developing and changing identity while using literacy practices in different situations. The results are based on eleven in-depth interviews (7 female, 4 male, age 30 to 65), ranging from 30 minutes to two hours. These interviews show multiple ways of individual use of literacy and also uncover subjective meanings and personal significance of literacy.

#### *3.1 Literacy as social practice: an overview*

The interviews give information about personal experiences using literacy, individual

significance of literacy and meanings of literacy conveyed by the social, political and cultural lifeworld. Both aspects are reflected in the interviews and play an important role when developing “literacy identity”. The analysis and interpretation of the interviews was conducted along the dimensions literacy events, literacy practices and social practices according to Street.

*Literacy events* mentioned concern the dimensions communication, work, everyday life, leisure, and learning processes. These are differentiated further and include aspects of reading and writing. It is used within vernacular routines, for entertainment and relaxation, in order to gain knowledge it is used as stimulus and reflection.

*Literacy practices* mirror literacy events, but the perspective of interpretation is changing. The focus becoming the individual meaning a person ascribes to a literacy event – for example writing e-mails, letters, a diary.

*Social practices*, which complement individual perspectives on literacy were presented in the theoretical framework of the study. These dimensions are biographical aspects; acquisition of literacy competences; learning theories; lifelong learning; inclusion and exclusion; multiliteracies.

All of the above categories play a role when asking for the relevance of literacy while developing identity. Therefore, in the following, I will reinterpret our data concerning the question of identity development and literacy.

### 3.2 *Literacy and Identity: The Role of Biography and Learning Experiences*

In a western culture, literacy skills are acquired through socialization and in formal, non-formal and educational settings. Learning processes are supposed to be leading to a culturally proficient literacy level. This process starts in early childhood and literacy practices in families play a very important role in developing identity (Zeuner & Pabst 2011, 187). How literacy competence is acquired varies considerably. Biographical settings, subjective self-awareness and overall experiences with teaching and learning in school and in further education are important aspects in the process.

The interviews show that people on the one hand positively judge the individual and social value of literacy. On the other hand, depending on the educational level, the learning processes themselves are either positively or negatively remembered. People with a higher educational background often remember these learning processes positively: “Learning how to write was fun” (Interview 2, 1), whereas a person with a lower educational background remembers her learning experiences in school more negatively: “I didn’t like the writing exercises. The reason was my teacher, she wanted me to use the right hand for writing, even though I am left-handed” (Interview 8, 1).

Attitudes towards literacy don’t seem to change in later life. One person tells about his upbringing in a middle-class family where books played an important role. He started reading early on, children books, books about history or science and literature. Reading existentialist literature in his teens led to playing the role of intellectuals with a friend. “We started wearing a beret, started smoking because I thought Sartre and the others always meet in cafés and smoke. They were something like role-models, not athletes or others” (Interview 7, 4).

Others consider reading and writing as necessity of life “like seeing, ... like breathing, ... it is just there” (Interview 4, 6). Reading and writing are seen as important as “food and drink” (Interview 2, 5), as a tool like “knife and fork” (Interview 8, 9), or as the “prerequisite for every kind of action” (Interview 10, 1). For one person reading means “power and consolations” as well as support in difficult situations (Interview 9, 17). All interviewees describe the integration of different forms of reading and writing

in their everyday life and its importance.

Also families play an important role for literacy competence. In some interviews parents tell how they consciously pass their positive attitudes concerning literacy on to their children, just by “doing literacy” with them. Reading children’s books, going to the local library early on, telling stories. In the beginning oral and written practices complement each other, until the children start to read for themselves.

In retrospect one person describes her experience of learning how to read as a child and interprets this in the sense of gaining autonomy and becoming emancipated: “If you are able to read for yourself, you don’t depend on others. People don’t have to spent time, you can sit down and read independently. I still liked it if someone read aloud, but being able to read by myself opened up an additional world. I became independent” (Interview 5, 1).

The same person describes how reading and writing are an integral part of her identity, that reading is part of her everyday life she wouldn’t miss. Also writing plays an important role, she not only refers to the functional aspect of writing: “Reading and writing open new worlds” (Interview 5, 3). For her, writing becomes an act of creativity, which leads to new dimensions of thoughts and ideas, and clarifies experiences.

Writing as literacy practice also shapes identity through reflective discourse. Several people see writing not only as a creative act where new thoughts are generated. They describe writing acts as soliloquy, which helps them to come to terms with difficulties. This happens by writing about problems and reflecting them: “I write down my thoughts. If I face problems, which I think I can’t solve, I write them down. This way I can reflect and reappraise them” (Interview 1, 6).

Writing a diary also helps to constitute and reconstitute identity. One person tells that she started writing at the age of 15, planning to write her autobiography, based in the entries in the diary when she is 80 (Interview 2, 3).

### 3.3 *Literacy and Identity: a Disorienting Dilemma?*

People who acquired literacy competences in childhood through formal and informal learning processes usually refer to these experiences positively. For them, literacy seems to be an integral part of their identity. The individual use of literacy competences seems to continuously influence and shape identity. However, people who are either illiterate or started to learn reading and writing as adults, tell a different story. While the first group usually doesn’t even reflect these skills as something special, for the second group it is emotionally challenging to talk about their literacy experiences. The fact that they either can’t read or write or learned it with difficulties in later life influences their identity considerably. Not only the three interviews of our study support this thesis, other research show similar results (Linde 2008).

Our interviewees developed different ways of coping with the phenomenon that they can’t or couldn’t read and write as adults. All three saw it as a personal problem or deficit, assessing the situation according to common cultural and societal expectations. The reasons why they didn’t learn to read and write in childhood differed. The two men experienced backlashes in formal educational setting. Their learning progress in school was slow, their teachers tried to help, but gave up after a while. They were allowed to skip certain exams and left school without proficient literacy skills. The woman migrated to Germany from Croatia, where she learned reading and writing in her native language. Living in Germany, she didn’t use these skills and never learned reading and writing in German.

All three started literacy-classes because of some kind of crisis or profound changes in

their lives. One man moved to another town and changed jobs, the other one was left by his wife. The woman was laid off and wanted to find another job. They participated for several years in literacy classes. But while the woman and one man succeeded learning literacy skills, the other gave up.

He runs his own workshop as a carpenter and developed strategies how to cope with his writing problems. The administration of the business is still done by his ex-wife. In his day-to-day tasks he uses his own writing system tries to remember as much as possible. But he also admits facing personal disadvantages because of his problems: he did not have a chance to get promoted in the fire-brigade he was volunteering in and he did not get the license to run a boat. He also decided for himself not to act politically or to write complaints to local authorities because he suspects he won't be taken seriously: "I wouldn't write. Because, if I know I make mistakes, I rather don't write. Because they would say: 'he is stupid, he can't even write'" (Interview 3, 3).

This example shows how the literacy and the lack of literacy skills influenced his identity of throughout life. Facing the dilemma being left by his wife, he decides to take part in a literacy class. He drops out after three years, having learnt some, but didn't become as proficient in writing as he expected. So he decides to give up writing. This is an interesting development, since this person decided to stick to his identity, which doesn't coincide with expectations of society. This could be interpreted with Pongratz and Büniger as "non-identity" or with Negt that he learned to cope with broken or threatened identity (Negt 2010, 223). It also shows in accordance with Illeris the importance of emotions for learning processes.

Contrary to this example the interview with the Croatian woman shows how the acquisition of literacy skills can lead to transformative learning processes and to identity transformation. During her adult life she knew about her lacking literacy skills and suffered because of them. She tells about her fear of being detected, of being disgraced or making a fool of herself. But at the same time she is aware of her competences and abilities, she is proud her work ethos, being hardworking and reliable. She developed different coping strategies at home and at work to come to terms with her lacking literacy skills, a few trusted people knew about her problems.

When she was laid off, her daughter encouraged her to take part in a literacy course at a community college. "Mama, do it. You can't lose anything." I said 'I am afraid.' 'Yes, but the others also can't do it'" (Interview 1, 1). What follows is a very intense story of a learning process, which, in the end, leads to a transformation of identity.

The interviewee participated in different literacy courses for five years, always trying to improve her reading and writing skills. Particularly interesting is her reflection on the learning process itself, how it changes her outlook towards learning, how she develops her own learning strategies and skills, how she challenges her teachers. She wanted to do homework, wanted it to be graded, wanted to get certificates. She thought this would help her to improve her skills. During the learning process she suffered drawbacks, had to fight frustration. But she developed a remarkable resilience not to give up. She asked people for help she trusted, developed learning strategies. But sometimes she is overwhelmed by frustration:

"I was totally wrecked and thought: I want to give up, I can't do it, I am stupid. But then I made myself some coffee, sat down and thought: 'I have look at my exercise books.' Then I leaved through them and thought: ' Oh God, I learned so much already, what do you want?' An then I kept going" (Interview 1, 5).

At the time of the interview she was able to read and to write, but she still participated in special literacy classes in order to further improve her skills. Reading and writing have become an integral part of her identity and she concludes: "The best thing I ever

have done in my life was to go to college. That I started the classes.” (Interview 1, 5). She reflects about reading and writing, and her newly gained skills: “It is fun to read books. One can learn a lot from books. Or get ideas or confirmation of one’s thoughts. ... And sometimes I write stories, about spring and so on. I get ideas from the classes” (Interview 1, 6).

Elements of transformative learning processes such as reflective discourse and critical reflection according to Mezirow, but also a change of layers for preference according to Illeris can be detected in this case. Meanings and habits of mind concerning literacy, own experiences versus culturally expected skills are being reflected upon and something like a congruent picture evolves for her.

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**What type of Transformative Learning possibilities available for adults within current educational policy in the United Kingdom?**

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**Abstract**

This paper is the result of an ongoing conversation between the authors over several years. It interrogates the complex and conflicting uses of the term 'transformative learning' from the perspectives of authors and their thoughts about the current situation in the United Kingdom. It offers the findings as a springboard for discussion during the Symposium.

**Ian Introduction**

This paper will take the form of conversation between Jacki and I. We will each speak in turns for about five minutes. I will present this introduction and Jacki the conclusion to our conversation. Between each turn in the conversation we will present a short video clip of colleagues and friends reacting to the question 'What do you think transformational learning is?' After our conversation is finished we will welcome contributions to a discussion of what we have said, the points raised in the videos, or any remarks which people believe might take the discussion forward. In many important ways this form of presentation reflects the origins of this paper. A short glossary has been prepared to accompany this discussion as it is not possible to talk about the area in which we work without using acronyms or some of the terrible jargon which is widely used. The glossary should help people from outside of the United Kingdom (UK), and quite possibly from inside it to understand what these terms mean. To no small extent the linguistic fog which has settled over UK education is itself a symptom of a widespread malaise one aspect of which, the constriction of transformative learning is the subject of the following conversation.

This paper can be seen as the setting down, and systematic representation of a conversation we have held over the last half a dozen years or so. Jacki and I worked together on a range of courses in the Department of Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) at Canterbury Christ Church University and it is from the viewpoint that this provided us that this paper is written. This context is important in two ways. Firstly, although we have different opinions on some aspects and interpretations of transformative learning we agree completely that it is essentially a matter of practice and real life activity. This is not at all to deny the importance of a theoretical grasp of 'transformative learning': in fact we would both agree that theory is essential if we are to understand and argue for what we believe to be right. What is being stressed is that there can be no purely theoretical 'transformative learning' it must always be a matter of classroom practices, curricula, interactions between and among students and teachers, discussions etc. Transformative learning must always involve a change or a development of the way in which those involved in it relate to the real world. The second way in which our work context has been important is also practical. We have been in a position to observe the historical development not only of the work of our own department in the university, but that of other departments and colleges.

We will both argue, albeit in different ways, that what we consider to be transformative learning still takes place, but that the regime which is currently in place, and which is presently strengthening its hold on education at all levels in the

United Kingdom has as its logical goal the elimination of genuinely transformative education. We both believe that this goal is ultimately unrealisable but the struggle for transformative education is getting harder all the time.

In the following discussion we will be concerned only with the discussion of transformative learning in what in Britain is called the Post Compulsory sector. We will especially be thinking in terms of Further Education, Adult Education, 'Access', and the training and development of those who teach in these areas. In preparing this paper we have not considered transformative education as it might happen in basic, elementary or even intermediate education in schools. We are also not considering the extremely important role of such entities as trade unions or social movements in developing transformative learning. This is an important point as transformative education is often the *raison d'être* of such organisations.

### **Jacki Definitions**

It is evident from research and talking to a variety of people, academics politicians, and practicing teachers, that the term 'transformative learning' is conflicted and interpreted differently by different people. These broadly fall into four categories: critical theorists, political and culturally orientated commentators, psychosocial researchers and teachers themselves. These categories are not exclusive and may overlap.

In order to advance our argument it may be helpful to identify some of the meanings 'transformative learning' that we have identified. Bruner is an example of a theorist who engages with the first two categories. He argues for a "hermeneutic view", he actively embraces 'negotiating and renegotiating meaning' (Bruner, 1986, p.123). He also emphasises social aspects, tracing his argument back to Piaget he notes that it is in childhood that children learn cultural assumptions. He insists that 'learning is a communal activity, a sharing of culture' (ibid. p.127). Importantly, too, Bruner emphasises the need for reflexivity, the development of the self, and inter-relational activity. These aspects are evident in the interviews with Lynn and Jane, and it is on these that Jacki places major importance.

Elias (1997) associates transformative learning with the opening of minds and self development, when he states that 'Transformative learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific capacities of the self' (p.3).

Mezirow (1997) claims that

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. For some, any uncritically assimilated explanation by an authority figure will suffice. But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgements, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understandings is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformative\\_learning\\_-\\_cite\\_note-3](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformative_learning_-_cite_note-3) (Mezirow 1997, p.5)

Mezirow isolates a number of factors for the individual that influence transformative learning, and since he cited by a number of commentators it may be helpful to state Mezirow's (1997) interpretation of transformative learning and conditions that promote it. He argues that transformations often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming clarified:



- A disorienting dilemma
- A self examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Planning a course of action
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
- Provision trying of new roles
- Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
- A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective

To the list above, Jacki would add the importance of imagination and creativity, and the spaces for transformative learning to occur. She will return to concept of spaces later in this paper.

Brookfield theorises about political approaches to transformative learning; drawing on Habermas and citing Mezirow, (1981). He actively argues that the political forms part of the dialogue: "Mezirow introduced adult educators who had been comfortable with the tradition of humanistic psychology to the realisation that a more conflictual, Marxist-inclined approach to interpreting adult learning processes was possible." (2005, Brookfield p.221).

Friere, too, is driven by political considerations when he discusses transformative learning and forcefully states that "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress." (1972, p.179).

In Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p.231) Mertens, Sullivan and Stace see transformative learning in terms of a paradigm for use as a potential model to research disability. Only a sentence is given to questions of reality and ontology, the development of the self which is so important in Jacki, Jane, and Lynn's framing of the term. It has been left to auto/biography and narrative enquiry to detail transformation and multiple ways of learning and knowing. (Cartlidge, 2014, Fraser, 2013, Hoult 2012).

The views of many teachers in Further Education are expressed by a report (2014) from their union. It endorses Ian and Jacki's view of political adoption of the phrase 'transformative learning' as a means of up-skilling the un-employed in order to satisfy employment demands, suggesting the manipulation stated in the Friere quote above. This means choice and funding for many courses is available only for those courses which satisfy government needs. The report also identifies increasingly consumerist approach to education, discussed by Ian, which states that, "Increasingly, the approach adopted by governments, particularly in England, is to unleash the forces of consumerism with more information for prospective students and funding following their choices" (Copeland, 2014, p.1).

### **Ian England Today**

The 'consumerist' approach to education has implications which are very far reaching not least because it is essentially opposed to transformative learning even though it utilises the language of development and even self actualisation. The idea of the student as a 'consumer' is itself immediately striking. Firstly it is opposed to the idea of the student (or indeed the teacher) as a 'producer' of education. In the United Kingdom government bodies, The Office for Standards in Education, and others talk about the 'delivery' of lessons and curricula. The idea is created of a commodity produced somewhere else being delivered fully formed by the lecturer or the teacher and it is then consumed by the learner. I would argue that this discourse which excludes teachers and students from any role, let alone a central one, in shaping and evaluating the curriculum or the lesson denies the reality of the exactly those processes which lie at the heart of transformative learning. In the consumerist discourse participation is replaced with an almost completely illusory 'choice'.

The full implications of 'consumerism' for transformational learning need further consideration. Both Jacki and I have argued that the phrase 'transformative learning' is open to differing and indeed diametrically opposed interpretations. At its most simple linguistic level 'transformation' might be used in a general way to describe any far reaching change. Taken at this level any successful programme of indoctrination could be counted as transformational learning provided it brought about changes of sufficient magnitude in the thinking and behaviour of those who passed through it. It is possible that some people listening to what I am saying here might think I am being too extreme so I will provide an instance of this 'indoctrination' as transformation. Jacki has already mentioned the many thousands of people who are unemployed who over the last dozen or so years have been forced to attend literacy classes on pain of losing their unemployment benefit. A central plank of the official curriculum of these courses is the idea that their unemployment is chiefly attributable to their lack of skills particularly in literacy and numeracy. At no point is unemployment strongly linked to a lack of employment possibilities. By any civilised measure this would be seen as indoctrination yet there are those who consider such programmes as transformational learning. In a sense they are as they set out to radically change the thinking of those who are forced to attend them.

The British academic and educational campaigner Richard Hatcher talks about two forms of privatisation in British education (2000). The first is exogenous the second endogenous. This is a really interesting way to think about some of the processes at work. Exogenous privatisation is relatively straightforward it is the placing of education into the control and ownership of private companies. This is very widespread in Britain at all levels of education. All Further Education colleges are now considered to be private and universities are increasingly driven by 'business models'. Endogenous privatisation is description given by Hatcher to the myriad of processes by which educational institutions at all levels are obliged to behave in ways which mirror or mimic private corporations. We have already considered the drive to turn all aspects of the curricula into commodities, the methods of management increasingly mimic those of the private sector with performance reviews, performance targets, and interestingly the imposition of business based fictions onto educational processes. Throughout the entire range of educational provision in Britain which is inspected by OFSTED which includes all school based education and all teacher training including that at university all lessons must have 'measurable' targets and in

each lesson there must be assessment to demonstrate the achievement of these targets. The idea of saying that by the end of the lesson a student should have a better understanding of x or y is not permitted. OFSTED inspectors are supposed to reject such lessons on the grounds that 'understanding' cannot be measured and is therefore not a suitable objective. Only that which can be measured is allowed. Yet everyone involved in education knows that real learning of any type and certainly not transformative learning can ever be metricated.

### **Jacki Spaces**

Transformative learning, as we have seen has a range of interpretations. Other equally important factors for transformative learning are the creation of safe transitional spaces where it can occur, and the provision of a forum, such as this conference, and spaces that promote dialogue about transformative learning and adults.

Jacki theorises using Winnicott's work on safe transitional spaces. Winnicott argues that safe, transitional spaces are essential for playing and development. Winnicott's use of the term 'playing' is too complex to interrogate here, but he identifies it initially occurring in the transitional space between mother and child, when the child first recognises the mother as separate from his/herself. It is a part of self development undertaken in safety. Although Winnicott worked mainly with children, he states that, "Whatever I say about children playing really applies to adults as well". (Winnicott, 1980, p.46). Understanding the impact of childhood and early object relating and safe transitional spaces underpins the work of Winnicott. Jacki considers that making oneself vulnerable, as Winnicott's image of the baby suggests, is part of the learning process; particularly if prior learning experiences have been unsuccessful, the classroom unsafe, and the teacher threatening or humiliating. Jacki argues that not only analysts but teachers also often find themselves revisiting previous learning experiences. The safe transitional spaces can be associated with the discussion earlier in the paper which addressed Mezirow's conditions necessary for transformative learning to occur.

Jacki considers that the interviews used for the symposium suggest the vulnerability of the interviewees, there was a need for a safe transitional space for the recording. The teachers in the interviews make themselves vulnerable by taking part and expressing views which might not be acceptable in some of their workplaces. However, they were comfortable with being filmed, they want their views acknowledged. Both Lynn and Jane show a determination to make transformative learning happen despite prevailing curriculum restrictions.

Lynn, elsewhere in the interview, gives an example of the impact of the constricting nature of the curriculum. It is also an example of what Winnicott's theory identifies as 'playing'. One of her Access to HE students made a very perceptive comment, he wanted to explore it, but because of time restrictions Lynn could not follow it up in class. However, Lynn is what Winnicott would identify as a "good enough" teacher, she held the student back after class and advised him how and where to research the concept. She showed she was thrilled and excited by his acute perception and her interest spurred the student to further research. We all need encouragement, especially adults in the early stages of returning to education, Britzman (2009) argues that it is needed every time we return to learning because we make ourselves vulnerable each time. A safe transitional space was created between Lynn and the student, but it was at the expense of Lynn's lunch break. She remarked that before the hours for the course had been cut back the whole class would have had the benefit of

playing with and exploration. The classroom would have been a safe transitional space shared by all, and might have provided an opportunity for transformative learning for some of the other students.

Finally, Jacki and Ian, together with the interviewees would agree that the classroom is not the only safe learning space, for many of our adult learners' prior experiences it has proved quite the opposite. As the interviewees point out such spaces could be discussions in the canteen queue, or in the car on the way home. As the curriculum becomes more outcomes linked and prescriptive, other ways of knowing and the informal spaces to facilitate transitional learning become increasingly important.

### **Ian**

That there is a neo-liberal assault on education and that it has as its objective the complete 'capture' of schools, colleges and universities is beyond pretty well beyond honest dispute (Harvey 2005, Ball and Youdell 2007, Hill 2009). The word honest is important here because as Ball and Youdell point out 'the trend towards privatisation of public education is hidden. It is camouflaged by the language of 'educational reform', or introduced stealthily as 'modernization' (p3). This is even truer if we bear in mind the processes Hatcher describes as 'endogenous privatisation'.

A central plank of genuine transformative learning is the development of an informed, critical and autonomous stance towards social and cultural questions. It is especially important that this stance is maintained in those areas which play an important part in the lives of students and teachers. If we accept this then it also follows that under a neo liberal regime every effort will be made to reduce the space and time within which transformative education might happen. There is not space to develop this argument here but I hope that it will just be acceptable to state that the essence of neo liberal education is the imposition of a corporate culture which sets strict limits on information, criticality, and autonomy. Does this mean that transformative education will not happen under a consolidated neo liberal regime? The short answer is 'not at all' though it is important to identify the real dangers.

The greatest danger for transformative learning is that those who believe in it lose faith or become convinced by the discourses of 'modernization' and 'reform' as described by Ball and Youdell (2008 p.3). In Britain those discourses are hegemonic, to comply with them not only appears to be the path of least resistance to offer opposition is increasingly risky. In teacher training for example to offer a critical view of OFSTED will more than likely be officially viewed as running counter to the imperative of 'getting a good grade' when inspected. A lesser danger but one which exists is posed by those voices which cling to the illusion that, at least in Europe, we continue to live in a society operating under social democratic conventions. Those arguing from this viewpoint hold to the idea that there has been no fundamental change. In trying to offer false comfort to themselves those denying that there has been a 'change in regime' are drawn into deceiving others.

Although it might be viewed as unfashionable I see the inevitability of the persistence and, hopefully, an eventual flourishing of transformational learning as being linked to 'class struggle' in the sense that this might have been understood by E.P. Thompson (1968) or Paolo Freire (1972). The process of re-organising education along the lines indicated by Hatcher's description of 'endogenous privatisation' (2000) brings with it risks for its ideological supporters. If we take as a starting point the idea that transformative learning is about students and learners trying to better understand the world they live in then the 'truths' of neo-liberalism are soon exposed. This happens

even more radically when attempts are made to forcefully impose these 'truths'. A simple example of this is provided by the OFSTED grading criteria. The only grade accepted by OFSTED lesson observations or school inspections is the grade of 'Outstanding'. This grade is only awarded when an institution or a teacher can demonstrate something close to complete compliance with, and almost zero divergence from, the OFSTED inspection criteria. The more draconian this inspection regime becomes the more it loses face validity among those inspected. The inspectorate for example refuses to engage in meaningful discussions with those inspected, and is increasingly viewed as a body hostile to teachers and the wider educational establishment. There are even problems at the level of language: A requirement for all institutions to be 'outstanding' is obviously oxymoronic.

All those studying and working in education who persist in trying to understand what is happening instead of just accepting it find themselves sooner or later bumping up against the neo-liberal hegemony. It is paradoxical, but strangely logical, that a regime which requires complete compliance turns any point of divergence into a contentious issue. The process of reflection on such issues is very likely to become transformative. The relentless pursuit of conformity intensifies dissent. The inability of those in power to provide answers capable of surviving any type of interrogation undermines the very legitimacy of their position. What we have in Britain today is an official position which continually seeks to marginalise genuinely transformative learning and in so doing increases its legitimacy and necessity.

### **Jacki Conclusion**

In this paper Ian and Jacki have interrogated transformational learning from their individual perspectives. They have reached for interpretations that, as Ian considers, have disappeared under a linguistic fog. We conclude that certain conditions and appropriate safe spaces are necessary for transformative learning to take place. The importance of the teacher in is evident, in Lynn's words they "make it happen". The contributors to this paper and the teachers interviewed all agree that despite current restrictions, which do not promote, or, indeed, hinder transformative learning, nevertheless, it is taking place. Ian argues that transformational learning is inevitable because of the class struggle. Jacki finds this optimistic because many arenas such as the WEA and Adult Education courses have been drastically reduced over the past twenty years. Overall, we remain positive, despite the tensions in educational policy and curriculum, transformative learning is still occurring. A forum, such as this conference helps to keep the debate alive, we do not offer firm conclusions, and we invite contributions from our colleagues from Europe and wider afield on their perception of transformative learning in their own countries.

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**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**





## **An alternative understanding of transformative learning processes: teachers talk about their professional experience of adult education**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses social constructionist dimensions of transformative processes concerning teachers who moved from formal to adult education. Findings, based on a wider ethnographic study in a Second Chance School, suggest the significance of an on-going process of teachers' learning based on a new perception of knowledge and professional identity.

### **Introduction**

#### *Background*

Research on contemporary professional development has revealed an increased interest in teachers' learning in forms of teacher development rather than teacher training. However, most initiatives concerning teacher development have been oriented towards a traditional view of professional staff development. This conventional view limits opportunities for adult learning to conferences, workshops and traditional in-service programs based on a conception of prepackaged knowledge transmission by outside specialists. Even in the cases where research review is narrowed to "alternative approaches to teacher learning of professional knowledge" main references concern professional development research projects (Wilson & Berne, 1999, p. 177). Moreover, current research and practice calls for a need to reconsider teacher learning "as an integral part of school life, or as part of a larger network of people struggling with teaching and learning problems" (Lieberman, 1995, p. 67).

On the other hand, research on teachers' professional identity emerged as a separate area in the 90's. Several authors attempted to explain the concept through the notion of identity shaping as a relational phenomenon and determining as such the teachers' attitudes, learning and development. It is argued that a social constructionist approach offers a more thorough understanding of teachers' identity formation as a dynamic process of integration between multiple knowledge sources (Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop, 2004). It is generally accepted that the concept is poorly defined through literature mainly because of the many ways in which the word "identity" had been used over time from different theoretical approaches (Olsen, 2008). It seems, though, that teachers' identity is linked to a basic set of assumptions and theories concerning teaching, learning, education in general and their selves in relation to these concepts. This set of assumptions, as a product of a complex interweaving between the social and the individual, informs teachers' attitudes and actions and justifies their choices and decisions. From this point of view, special emphasis should be given to enabling contexts which promote learning experiences that treat teachers as "whole persons" who continually reconstruct their views of themselves in relation to others, workplace characteristics, professional purposes, and cultures of teaching (Olsen, 2008).

This paper explores the issue of formal teachers engaging in transformative learning processes in relation to their professional involvement with adult education in a Second Chance School in Greece. From teachers' interview discourse we gain useful insights into their own interpretation of this experience and its implications for their perception of "teacher-self" (Zembylas, 2003).

### *Aim and Objectives*

This paper focuses on an alternative understanding of a transformative experience for teachers who moved from formal to adult education, thereby reconsidering their practices and beliefs and re-thinking their professional identity. For this, I give voice to the teachers with an emphasis on their own conceptualizations.

The main objectives are (a) to shed light onto shifts in educators' previous ways of thinking, feeling and acting as part of expression of an internal dialogue between their previous assumptions about education and their current practices and conceptions, (b) to analyze these shifts in terms of a wider process of professional identity formation and construction of a different educational "reality" for those teachers and (c) to contribute to a wider dialogue concerning the importance for formal teachers to constantly interrogate their notion of themselves as teachers as embedded in socio-cultural context.

### **Methodological Issues**

#### *The Setting*

Second Chance Schools (SCSs) in Greece are two-year public educational programs for adults older than 18 years who have dropped out from compulsory secondary education. SCSs were created under the auspices of the European Union and were instituted by law in 1997. According to the European Commission typology of strategies for lifelong learning, SCSs program is incorporated in the following action strategies: a) complementary education and training and b) personal, social and cultural development. After attending the program successfully, the educatees receive a title equivalent to the secondary education diploma.<sup>6</sup> The theoretical basis of this program differs from traditional pedagogy, which characterizes mainstream education in Greece. The focus is on a process of knowledge production rather than on a passive knowledge reception by the learners. In this sense, emphasis is given to critical literacy and project method (Pigiaki, 2006).

#### *The Methodology*

The data analyzed here is part of a wider ethnographic study that was conducted between 2009 and 2010 in a SCS located in a town in north-western Greece (Charissi, 2011). Basic research interest focuses on the meaning attributed to their professional experience by those formal teachers implementing the specific adult education initiative. Field work was based on participant observation of staff members' "out of classroom" interactions and practices and semi-structured interviews with them.

Informants were selected with the criterion that they had long-term experience in that school. Thus, those who participated in the interviews were working in the specific context since its first or second year of operation. They were asked to reflect on their experience of adult education and describe what it meant to them. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the analysis was carried out on the written text. A central issue raised by the teachers themselves was the significance of the experience on both a personal and a professional level. Coding of the relevant findings is focused on (a) the role of relationships and (b) controversies concerning the participants' taken for granted assumptions and practices about education.

Having its roots in Anthropology, Ethnography belongs to a still minority tradition of qualitative research in Greece. Its contribution, though, is crucial to an understanding

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<sup>6</sup> M. D. 2373/2003 and M. D. 260/16-01-2008.

of the shared meanings that characterize a culture or a group of people. Thus, an ethnographic research orientation seemed the most appropriate for this study. My personal involvement with the “field”, because of my previous 6-year professional experience as administrative support staff in the school, proved decisive. I was familiar enough with the participants’ everyday school-life and had already established with them a relationship of respect and trustworthiness. Both techniques, participant observation in the form of “in situ” field notes and interviews, were exploited for the needs of methodological triangulation.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### *A Social Constructionist View of Transformative Learning*

Transformative learning has been the most researched and discussed theory of adult education almost since 1980. Basically linked to the work of Jack Mezirow, it is widely referred as transformative learning theory. As a theory of learning it is mainly concerned with adults and has its roots in human communication as expressed within the work of Jurgen Habermas. Citing Mezirow, Taylor mentions that it is mostly a theory where ‘learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action’”(Taylor, 2007, p. 173).

Taylor’s (2007) critical review revealed that most studies conducted between 1999 and 2005 were theoretically framed within Mezirow’s conception. In a total of 40 studies, only two were focused on a particular transformative context and one of them contributes to a social constructivist understanding of the role of the context (Taylor, 2007, p. 184).

This paper explores transformative learning from a social constructionist standpoint. In doing so, special emphasis is attributed to the insiders’-namely, teachers- making sense of a SCS non-formal educational context. Social constructionism offers a significant alternative to perspective transformation through the lens of social construction of reality based on a continuous interplay between the individual and the social. It is a tension in social analysis that represents a new paradigm of thinking about “reality” as a world of meanings, relationships and practices that are inter-subjectively shared. Such a “reality” serves as one’s frame of reference for interpreting the world, the self and the other, while, at the same time, is potentially subjected to re-negotiations of meanings through social processes and interactions.

The dynamic interrelation between knowledge and social action is considered as one of social constructionism basic assumptions. By focusing on our perception of the world as socially and culturally constructed, social constructionism invites us to be critical about our “taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves” (Burr, 2003, p. 2). Certain ideas, values, practices and interpretations constitute the knowledge incorporated into our personal identity while informing and being informed by our social actions. Social constructionism, then, identifies the capacity of human beings to shape new possibilities of action or “[t]he emphasis upon the constructive work of individuals in interaction that is the focus of the micro approach implicitly affords us personal agency” (Burr, 2003, p. 23).

#### *Teachers’ Professional Identity*

During the 90’s, when teachers’ professional identity emerged as a separate research area, several authors attempted to explain its meaning in relation to the concept of identity as used in social sciences and philosophy. In this sense, the work of the symbolic interactionist Mead, where identity is related to the concept of self as a

product of social interactions, presents a significant interest (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 107). Humans tend to respond to others according to their interpretations of the social situations and to their perception of others' expectations. As Rock (2001) argues "significant others define acts and selves, and are themselves situated" (Rock, 2001, p. 29). In regard to social constructionism, it is important that the individual identifies her/himself with her/his significant others through a dialectic process and finally "not only takes on the roles and attitudes of others, but in the same process takes on their world" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 152).

From an overview of the studies conducted between 1988 and 2000, the concept of self seems to be essential in defining professional identity while reflection or self-reflection are considered as important related concepts (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 113-114). A strong emphasis is put on a perception of teachers' identity as being shaped through a "complex and dynamic equilibrium" between a teacher's sense of self as being a teacher and taken-for-granted theories, values and norms about teaching (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 113). In line with this view there are several features being identified as essential in teachers' identity formation. These features seem to emphasize an on-going teacher development process based on the interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences, the person in relation to context, the existence of both core and peripheral sub-identities or roles, and agency. Agency implies teachers' active participation in their identity formation based on a dynamic process of knowledge construction about self through complex and meaningful social interactions (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 122-123).

In contemporary pedagogy, the notion of "teacher-self" represents a more flexible perspective of teachers' identity. Zembylas (2003) mentions several ethnographic and other theoretical accounts that question the existence of a "teacher identity" as a stable and consistent entity and highlight the "situatedness" of teacher-self (Zembylas, 2003, p. 107). Furthermore, teacher-self is described as constituted "in response to multiple meanings" as negotiated through "discourses, practices and performances" (Zembylas, 2003, p. 107-108). Emotions, as well as thoughts and actions lay at the essence of teacher-self and play a significant role in teacher identity formation (Zembylas, 2003, p. 108).

#### *A Social Constructionist View of Pedagogical Practice*

Practices of education presuppose a set of assumptions about human nature and capacities of human beings that specify humans' relationship with the world and each other. Knowledge seems to be a core concept and as such, relevant beliefs "inform, justify and sustain our practices of education" (Gergen, 2001, p. 115). A social constructionist standpoint offers an alternative view of pedagogical practice that goes beyond the traditional orientations to knowledge, namely the "exogenic" or "world centered" and the "endogenic" or "mind centered" (Gergen, 2001, p. 116).

Mainstream education is largely organized within these traditional conceptions which share the same view about knowledge "as the possession of single minds" (Gergen, 2001, p. 118). The educational model is hierarchical and supports a knowledge transmission monologic route from a body of experts, who possess the truth, to students, who "will ultimately be taught - or 'fed', in Freire's terms" this truth (Gergen, 2001, p. 125). Teachers' role is purely instrumental, aiming to "fill" the students with the contents of standardized knowledge. The recipients of pre-packaged knowledge which has been alienated by its context of usage are denied a voice of their own (Gergen, 2001, p. 126).

Social constructionism suggests an alternative understanding of knowledge "as a

byproduct not of individual minds but of communal relationships” (Gergen, 2001, p. 119). Consequently, private actions, including those “traditionally indexed as ‘thought’ or ‘feeling’”, are considered as “intelligible” in their “social use” and “a preceding immersion in relationship” (Gergen, 2001, p. 119). Without attempting to replace traditional views, this relational view of knowledge opens a horizon of possibilities by adding dimension to the critique concerning the implications of mainstream educational practice. This critical stance focuses on the “problems of power”, “decontextualization”, as well as to “the problematics of monologic vs. dialogic practices of meaning making” (Gergen, 2001, p. 126).

The authoritative monologue that characterizes mainstream educational practice is largely associated to “self-referring” and “self-substantiating” professional discourses sustained by disciplinary agendas within which certain forms of ‘official knowledge’ are being legitimized (Gergen, 2001, p. 132). Teachers are immersed in such discourses and the accompanying practices throughout their school life. From a constructionist standpoint, “all knowledge is perspectival and value saturated”. In turn, new avenues of departure may open if we emphasize the cultural and historical situatedness of knowledge. One of the main aims of educational movements should be oriented towards the empowerment of “those who have traditionally been excluded from knowledge production”, teachers included (Gergen, 2001, p. 127).

Social constructionism challenges the current, “prescriptive”, according to Freire, mode of pedagogy which rests upon an “uncritical consumption of knowledge” (Mayo, 1994, p. 135). Instead, it “favor[s] practices in which students work together with teachers and others to decide on issues of importance and the kinds of activities that might best allow significant engagement” (Gergen, 2001, p. 130). Current disciplinary agendas supporting fragmentation of knowledge should be replaced by agendas that are set by “issues of practical public (or private) concern” in order to acquire a meaning in practice (Gergen, 2001, p. 129).

## Findings

### *The Personal and Professional Significance of the Experience*

Compared to mainstream educational context teachers’ experience of this school is characterized as a “lifetime experience”, a “personal and professional experience” that “gives you something very powerful[...]. What’s the point if you get paid but you don’t enjoy emotional fulfillment”. Furthermore, the respondents describe it as a process of mutual sharing:

*I don’t feel that I work. I’m happy when I leave the school. I give and take. In fact, I take much more than I give. We are emotionally involved with these people.<sup>7</sup> We cry together, laugh together, are puzzled together, share things”. (Amalia)*

Most of the teachers describe a process of relating to each other – to colleagues and students- through the development of “acceptance of differences”, “sensitivity”, “deep understanding of distinctiveness”. Relationships are valued as an important factor of teachers’ personal and professional development: “I think that a very important role in this school plays the personal relationship that you develop with students and with colleagues”.

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<sup>7</sup> “these people”= students or educatees in adult education.

*The role of relationships.* Teachers attribute special emphasis on the relationships developed between educators and educatees as a form of “*interaction with adults that bring with them experiences, attitudes, worries*”. They characterize their relationship with the educatees as “*communication*” based on “*trustworthiness*” and mutual “*respect*”. They acknowledge this as a process of human exchange that expands beyond “*mere knowledge*”. It incorporates “*attitudes*”, “*values*” and “*experiences*” creating this way a sense of “*sharing much more with these people*” than just being a teacher and a student. “*We helped each other. We took from the educatees and they took from us. They had a long experience*”. What counts most for the educators is a sense of “*usefulness*” and “*recognition*” based on the “*explicit appreciation*” on students’ side. A sense of mutual “*admiration*” strengthens educators’ will to offer:

*You see people in difficulties, with a lot of experiences in their lives, which in most cases were not positive experiences, and you see the strength they have, to continue, to fight, to try to be better. For me these people are worth of admiration. [...]. You say that, since these people try and do things, I should try for them. You feel more useful because they are interested, simply. This is very important. [...] they say to you ‘thank you so much’. How many chances are there to experience that? Is there a chance for a formal teacher to experience that? I doubt it. (Christina)*

The meaning they attach to the relationships developed within classroom, affects teachers’ perception of learning and their role as educators. Relationships are seen as an integral element of cooperative learning and inquiry process that goes beyond standardized curricula. Educatees learn through their active participation in school practices, cooperation, co-inquiry and exchange of ideas and experiences:

*Students expressed themselves and left all others speechless. Without books, we wrote some things on the blackboard, we used notes, copies, newspapers and worked collectively, in groups. They found it difficult at the beginning, but then, little by little, they loved it, because they exchanged ideas, they expressed their opinion, they admitted that there were things they didn’t understand and we went through the text again[...]. (Kleio)*

This process of learning presents a special interest to teachers as it is also linked to a “*socialization process*” that educatees “*had missed until then*” or that they “*wouldn’t have experienced otherwise*”. Most of the informants seem to agree that “*It is important [for these students] to get out of the house*”, “*to get in touch with other people*”, “*for women, to do something else, except housekeeping*”. Educatees’ participation in out-school activities is valued as most important:

*To go to the cinema and watch a movie [...] is equivalent to one month’s lessons at school. There are very important things happening outside classroom. They have even attended concerts [...]. This thing is very important for these people. They will not easily given the chance to do it again or they wouldn’t have chosen to do it at all [...].(Christina)*

Teachers consider their relationships with colleagues as something they haven’t experienced before. Their statements resound with phrases like “*a different climate,*

*colleagues were enthusiastic about their job”, “a very good climate”, “there was a very friendly climate and this contributed to make the school move on”, “relationships are more personal and more human”, “colleagues had a positive role”, “we have developed friendly relationships and our collaboration is perfect”.*

Informants consider relationships as part of a wider “team” spirit and a sense of “collectivity” that has grown within school. This spirit is based on everyone’s participation and each one’s contribution, depending to her/his “personal interests” and “social concerns”. It is also mentioned as a kind of “bonding” and “unity” that supersedes “personal pursuits” or “politics”, “an orchestra, like a whole”, “a family”. “Substantial relationships” are considered as constitutive of teamwork and presuppose, according to respondents, a form of inter-personal sensitivity: “we have many things in common. [Quest. Would you like to tell me about these common things?]. Like I told you before, respect, sensitivity, we care for not offending each other”.

Relationships with colleagues are perceived by the teachers as inherent to the “philosophy of the school” which, because of its flexible curriculum, “requires cooperation, communication, to display the work you do”. Participants describe a continuous process of cooperation with colleagues:

*Cooperation has the form of the exchange of ideas, opinions and in the process..., this happens in small groups or as a plan of the whole team, whether it concerns the planning of an event or an activity. This is organized during meetings, following team procedures, which means that we express our opinion, agree, disagree, come to a conclusion. (Ioanna)*

And furthermore: “There is a lot of cooperation and this has to do even with out of classroom practices, like educational visits, or in-school practices, such as workshops or projects”. Most of the informants mention that they were “helped” by their colleagues through dialogue, observation or even participation in others lessons.

*Controversies.* Participants admit a number of controversies they faced concerning their taken for granted assumptions and practices about education and their role in it. They strongly support an on-going process of learning for themselves, “a development procedure” based on “a constructive dialogue which may lead to revising our views and helping us develop at various levels”.

The experience of “being members of a team and acting as a team” was something “unprecedented” to them, taking into consideration their previous experience. Staff meetings played a crucial role in establishing a team spirit:

*It changed me. It changed my way of thinking as much as my attitudes. [...]. We had Tuesday meetings. This is how we got to know each other [...], it would help formal school also, because we support each other and exchange ideas, at various levels—about pedagogy, learning, our attitudes---- toward students, because the relationship with them is dynamic, you have to make adaptations. (Kleio)*

There is a consensus on the issue of their “active participation in school procedures” and the “freedom to express themselves”. Consequently, they think of themselves as active and valued members of the school society: “There is a freedom of expression, but even more acceptance [...]. Teachers’ opinions are adopted”. Even when someone

doesn't have a specific proposition to make

*The sense of participating in a team, the fact that we do things collectively, it makes us feel as a team, emotionally, mentally [...]. We don't feel as mere employees, who just pass through a working place, without any human contact, without knowing anything about the person next to us. We know what the person next to us concerns himself with. That is of a great importance. (George)*

It is generally accepted that different viewpoints are also expressed, “sometimes intensely”, but there is an acceptance that “everyone can benefit from kind-hearted differences” or that “diversity can enrich the dialogue, can contribute to a problem-searching process”.

The “freedom” these teachers experienced in expressing themselves through their work and the relationships they developed with others revealed new possibilities and helped them reconsider beliefs and attitudes about learning:

*Learning is not only that I give and they take. Learning is context-dependent and bidirectional. I learn and they learn, simultaneously. And each time you learn something different. You may teach the same lesson in different classrooms, but it won't be the same. It depends on who is opposite to you and what motives she/he will give you. (George)*

Flexible curriculum and scientific support seems to engage these teachers in creative learning initiatives:

*This school opens new possibilities of action. When you don't have a certain subject matter, the book which limits you [...] you create from the beginning, which is not easy. This made me more active, more curious to learn new things, my participation in school workshops motivated me to develop new talents, some of which I didn't even know that I had. For example, I wrote a play, which I had never considered as possible, I even composed songs for these students. It made me express myself, create and present my work. [...] and now I continue to do different things outside school that I had never dreamed of. (Christina)*

The process of learning is dynamically formulated based on students' experiences, expectations and needs. Previous perceptions of teaching are revised:

*This teacher-centered and typical process during which you mainly lecture and the others listen. This has nothing to do with substantial learning. I no longer approve it. If you teach like that in this school you lose students' respect. [...]. If you don't engage their experiences and previous knowledge in the learning process, they won't be motivated, they won't participate. [...] For me a lot of things changed. I continue my studies in adult education. In other words, there was a personal development because of the motivation I had within the school. (Dimitris)*

Inquiry seems to be an important element of teachers' new role within an educational setting without pre-specified curricula, which follows a pedagogy based on students'



active learning and critical awareness development: “*This is a place where you can be freely a researcher of your practice, along with good partnerships*”. According to a representative statement:

*My work was mostly based on inquiry, all these years. [...]. This is education too, but with a different methodology and I wish that this could happen in formal schools also.[...]I even present it in teachers' meeting, where we exchange ideas and get feedback.* (Kleio)

### **Discussion**

Participants' discourse mainly focuses on evaluating their professional experience of adult education as both personally and professionally important to them. Their meaning-making is based on (a) exploring the potential of new forms of relatedness within educational practice and (b) interrogating their previous assumptions about education.

Teachers describe an on-going process of cooperative learning for themselves as well as for their students based on mutual experimentation and exchange of ideas, experiences, practices. They consider their relationships with students and colleagues as offering a positive context for substantial involvement and creative social interchange. Cooperative learning and collaborative inquiry seems to be of great importance to the exploration of the potential inherent in a relationship centered education. By shifting the interest of learning to our “language-constituted relations with others”, cooperative learning opens new possibilities of world construction based on “engaging, incorporating and critically exploring with others” (Gergen, 2001, p. 135).

The absence of pre-standardized curricula and the importance of engaging adults as active participants in their own learning were experienced by the informants as providing the freedom to express themselves. Teachers also felt free to participate in dialogic practices of meaning making inside and outside classroom and decide collaboratively on issues of importance. Within this democratic context, teachers and students are empowered to include themselves in knowledge production and critically examine authoritative discourses from alternative standpoints (Gergen, 2001, pp. 127-32).

Teachers describe going through a process of development for themselves. By participating in a “*constructive dialogue*” with others they critically explore new possibilities opened for themselves as well as for their educatees from an alternative view of knowledge as shared meanings and learning as a relational phenomenon. Teachers reconsider their mainstream role as sole dispensers of knowledge by sharing with students “*much more than mere knowledge*” and negotiating with students and colleagues assumptions about what counts in educational practice. Such an opening to an on-going, enriching dialogue aiming to reveal the strengths and weaknesses implicit to discursive views of the real and the good could produce conscious members of society “capable of articulating their own views on our collective life” (Gergen, 2001, p. 133).

From a constructionist standpoint, meanings are being negotiated within specific relationships in which the individual participates. A shift in education from authoritative monologue to dialogue and creative interchange emerges inevitably from an appreciation of knowledge as shared meanings. The challenge for the educator is, then, to contribute to new more inclusive forms of relatedness within educational practice (Gergen, 2001, p. 134).

## Conclusion

In this paper previous formal teachers talk about their professional experience of adult education. They describe a process of reconsidering their taken for granted assumptions about education, teaching and learning and their sense of teacher-self in the light of the possibilities opened within a constructive epistemology and the dialogic practices of a relationship centered education.

Their new professional experience is characterized by a shift from the authoritative monologue of mainstream education to dialogue. Teachers re-gain a voice of their own and are empowered to shape new possibilities of action by critically exploring cultural reality with colleagues and students.

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**Transformative Learning: connections between a “disorienting dilemma” and “deutero-learning” during the process of university faculty choice**

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The aim of this paper is to focus on the experience of *disorientation* in the process of university faculty choice in order to reflect upon the connections between transformative learning and Gregory Bateson's deutero-learning (1977). Specifically, the work concentrates on constructing an analogy between the first phase of transformation (disorienting dilemma) as theorised by Mezirow and *disorientation* as a “sacred” moment as forwarded by Bateson.

The Italian word “orientamento” (orientation) and the attention toward the “sacred”

The idea for this paper originated in my Master's graduate thesis in Pedagogic Science and constitutes a preparatory work for my Doctoral thesis. The research, presently in course, takes place in a guidance service at the University of Milano-Bicocca, in Italy. The following premises refer specifically to the national panorama and to the impact of European policies in the area of Lifelong Learning, on Italian educational practise. According to Mezirow, reflection is the central dynamic in theories about adult learning and it is the reflection upon premises which provides the possibility of transforming our prospects (Mezirow, 1991). Accordingly, the first part of this paper is dedicated to presenting the significance of the Italian word “*orientamento*”. In Italian, when you speak of “*processi d'orientamento*” (career guidance) the term “*orientamento*” is used, while European programmes use the definition “Life Career Design” (Zarifis, Gravani, 2014).

The Italian word “orientamento” derives from *oriens*, in Latin, which means east, or better, to rise. It is known that in antiquity humans oriented themselves in space and time as a consequence of their observation of the sky. In addition, the sun is an extremely important symbol which appears in numerous ancient traditions: the luminous star which gives life, light and warmth is a divinity. For example, in a Greek temple, the edifice that for the ancient Greeks was considered the house of God (*oikos*), always has an east-west orientation with an opening facing East where the sun rises. According to scholars of Greek architecture, the basic concept of the Greek temple lies in the relationship that exists between the divine and the human – in a continual interaction with each other. The idea of speaking of “*orientamento*” and of “sacred” is subject to risk, but the sensation of harmony intrinsic in the Greek temple (Lippolis & A., 2007) is useful in understanding the entire dynamic of relationships which connect humans to the world they inhabit. Specifically, Bateson's studies of the sacred allow for the development of new ideas when thinking about orientation. In *Ecology of the Mind* (Bateson, 1972) he takes on the theme of sacredness as a moment of developing a sensitivity that is capable of understanding the structure which connects everything (the pattern which connects) as a function of an always expanding awareness of one's human condition.

In this type of approach, processes of orientation are transformative because they are occasions for learning which induce an adult to develop higher levels of comprehension (Merizow, 1996). Effectively, the orientation experience is an event in which the subject (learner) can implement explicit choices and strategies to construct

reflectiveness. These abilities are central aspects of the Lifelong Learning programmes in the European Union (UE, 2000).

“Disorienting dilemma” and *disorientation*

Learning is transformative when an adult accepts the disorientation and doubts relating to his/her future. Educators are responsible for helping subjects become more autonomous and socially responsible in their thoughts about their choices (Mezirow, 1997). The career guidance service in which I carry out my research offers group encounters for future university students aimed at stimulating ideas and reflections about their choices with respect to their course of study. The encounters focus on participants' experience starting from their questions, while the role of the educator trainers is to call forth, analyse and transform the students' stories and experiences. The context of reference is the Italian tradition of autobiographical education (Formenti, 1998). This perspective considers learning as both life-wide and lifelong processes (West et al, 2007): for an adult, an orientation encounter can be an occasion for exploring different parts of one's self and one's identity, and then, to connect them. The service is available to young adults in search of ideas aimed at imagining their future course of study, as well as to mature adults seeking a new professional training programme. The following two examples are taken from material gathered during my research. The first is an excerpt from an autobiographical comment made about a drawing by Chiara, a seventeen-year-old student from a high school near Milan. The second is an excerpt from a “motivational letter” written by Adriana, a mature adult who has decided to return to university.

“My biggest dream is to find myself. I want to understand who I am, what I want from life, and above all, make order in my thoughts so I can find my path. The first step? To begin an introspective process, perhaps starting with looking at myself in the mirror and asking out loud: Who am I?” (Chiara, 17 years old, Milan, February 2014).

“It's not easy to start your life over again from where you left off, in writing and not only. My youth, university years and afterwards, had been marked by a deep interest towards the world of childhood. Then my life took off in different directions, in any case they were happy ones. I dedicated myself to images and photography for many years and I am still doing these activities. However, due to a series of circumstances, the idea of looking again at what I thought would have been my direction came forth again” (Adriana, 45 years old, Milan, September 2013).

These brief accounts are fragments which, however partial, demonstrate that the search for self and for meaning are present as motivations prior to the entrance into university and into university life. In addition they illustrate that they are reflective devices brought out by the questions about disorientation that generate “disorienting dilemmas”. While most of orientation subjects would like to have an immediate answer to their questions, transformative orientation practises can take advantage of doubts and ambiguities as possibilities for creation and discovery. So, it is disorientation which sets off a series of doubts in which one's prospects of meaning begin to be perceived as inadequate and disturbing, creating a tension that is useful in bringing out the choice of one's university faculty.

*Disorientation* and Deutero-learning as a “sacred” moment

The career guidance service, using a systemic process, explores the experience of “becoming” a university student and, at the same time, aims at innovating the

traditional culture of and practises existing in university orientation. In Italian universities the general tendency is to “provide” orientation by offering students information about degree programmes, and to ask the students to find the “right path”. Thus, to orient oneself is similar to using Google Maps or the numerous other devices based on the same type of systems that identify the best route, in order to reach the destination of the encounter between the university's programmes on offer and the students' formative/training needs. This means “giving the right indications” and providing information which allows them to not “take the wrong path”. In this instructional type of logic, uncertainty and “disorienting dilemmas” are problematic, not only for the subjects seeking guidance, but also for academic institutions (Formenti, 2009).

The research for my Master's degree explored the theme of disorientation within the service's “Let's talk about it groups – *Gruppi Parliamone*” (Vitale, 2012). These were peer orientation groups led by two interns from the Master's degree course in Pedagogic Sciences which met for two hours, with optional attendance. There I observed how circularity between processes of orientation and disorientation can be created in the group encounters by faces and voices that differ due to life stories, gender, motivations and experiences. The conversations were based upon the students' writings in a self-reflection portfolio, autobiographical in nature, which was designed to explore many aspects of themselves and to try to identify connections between these aspects and the motivations behind their choices. This vehicle included open questions that were divided into the following four sections:

- I know myself: multiple choice questions to discover the skills and limits of the student;
- My history... past, present and future: a proposal for an autobiographical account aimed at better understanding the passions, dreams and experiences of the person who is planning his/her future;
- I know what the university offers me: questions aimed at bringing out the information that the student already knows about the university context;
- I understand the professional opportunities available for the types of study chosen;

Responding freely in writing, along with the dialogue that ensued, allowed participants to approach the university as if it were a “foreign land” and to explore this unknown terrain. The objective was not to create a map of the territory, because, as sustained by Bateson, “the map is not the territory” (Bateson, 1979), but to learn together–disoriented students, and the leaders themselves who are in training–how to live with the uncertainty of not exactly knowing the exact destination point of one's “goal”. Such practises activate reflections in the group which offer the subject both an occasion for discovering aspects of his/herself and to acquire new elements to apply to their choice of university faculty. The method used to accompany the process of transformation of the possibilities of meaning is the model of spiral knowledge - *Spiral of Knowledge* (Formenti 2005, 2009). This methodology is based upon the concept of deuterio-learning proposed by Bateson. In describing learning the author makes an explicit appeal for change and, specifically, defines deuterio-learning as a corrective change of the alternatives available as a whole in which the change actually takes place (Bateson, 1987). As such, it follows that the function of this type of learning is not to render subjects suitable to a certain type of situation, but to “learn

how to learn”, and this function is a transformative process (TL )

The process of spiral knowledge is composed of four movements termed Authentic Experience, Aesthetic Representation, Intelligent Understanding and Deliberate Action. These passages are defined in lay terms as a path towards the sacred or as a sacred inquiry (Formenti, 2005). Formenti resumed study of Bateson's last papers (Bateson G., Bateson M.C., 1987), those dedicated to the theme of the sacred, in order to further examine and reflect upon the theme of dis-connection. According to the author, disorientation and disorienting dilemmas originate in cases where the subject perceives dis-connection, that is, a separation of self, from the various parts of which he/she is composed and from the reality of which he/she is part. Disorienting experiences, if experienced from this point of view, and with this approach, are moments of deutero-learning and of re-orientation which allow one to embrace a complex vision of reality. In fact, by using the spiral method the guides are able to generate transformative learnings in which the disoriented subjects can creatively connect the various parts of themselves which they perceive as separate.

The method proposes an aesthetic approach to knowledge through the use of various creative expressions – autobiographical drawings and writings and aesthetic modalities which include the body.

Specifically, my research will examine the use and the creation of corporeal practises capable of generating transformative learning. The objective is to understand the role of the subjects' body experiences in giving meaning to the rapid evolutions and uncertainties of their present realities (Formenti, Castiglioni, 2014). In the preliminary phase of research I created a formative game to be proposed as part of the activities of “Lab'O – Laboratori d'Orientamento” (Orientation Workshops). The Orientation Workshops, under the responsibility of the newly-formed research group *Frogs*, are an evolution of the “Let's talk about it” groups and consist of a scenario of heterogenous orientation proposals intent on compiling the needs and desires of students who are entering Milan's university.

The game called “The Wheel of Fortune: the Question is Right!” attempts to propose the idea of Ecology of the Mind through orientation practises and within the contexts of orientation. The base premise is to accept the ecological rationale for beauty, that is, *the aesthetic of being alive*, as a scientific hypothesis. The emphasis on aesthetics references the idea of the sacred in the creation of orientation contexts in which the subjects can experience surprise, beauty, marvel and mystery.

In practical terms the game consists of a carton box containing:

1. 1 wooden wheel made of various colours with a rotating arrow at its centre (similar to a clock with minute and hour hands)
2. 4 multi-coloured cloth sacks containing questions from the “self-reflection portfolio” used during the “Let's talk about it” groups

The game is meant for a variable number of players (from 5 to 15 participants), divided into teams, who take turns spinning the wheel, picking a question – from the sack of the colour that corresponds with the section of the wheel where the arrow stops – and trying to respond as a group. The objective of the game is not to identify and award a winning team, but to invite participants to discuss the motivations behind their choice of study and to explore possible alternatives. The questions concern the “self-reflection portfolio” in a playful and fun way with the aim of providing a pleasant and relaxed experience where one can think about one's future and about one's self through debate and participation. Here is an excerpt of a brief dialogue:

Question: “If you wanted to follow an alternative path, and not enrol in university,

what would you like to do?

Giorgio: “I don't really know what I like. I would like to stop for a while. To take a year off to think of what I'd like to do.”

Franca: “I like traveling. I'm thinking about going abroad. I don't want to continue studying. I could take studying up again later, perhaps.”

Giulia: “I feel obligated to continue studying. I wouldn't know what else to do.”

Mario: “Studying is like running. If one is already warmed up, he can't stop, he must keep on running!”

Niccolò: But, in my opinion one mustn't always keep running! It's useful to have different experiences and to leave the daily grind behind.”

Isabella: “We can no longer think about what we want to do, but about what's waiting for us outside school (in society). I think about work. What kind of work can I find after studying?”

Erika: But I think we must do what we like, and then find our path!”

Alessio: I don't think you have to adapt to society. Break out of conventional schemes!”

Luca: “And, I don't want to live for my job... I would like to live first, then think about work!”

Simone: But, there are those who live only to make money, right?”

Sara: “And, they are only looking for people with work experience... but, even if you have a degree you can't find work. It's absurd!”

Niccolò: “The important thing to be flexible and active, then you will find work and you can adapt.”

Riccardo: “Exactly! It depends which path you take... you can start from a fixed point and then change paths!”

Niccolò: “You must also create opportunities for yourself and cultivate your passions!” (Milan, April 2014).

From these comments the spatial category emerges (internal/external, inside/outside) to describe the processes of orientation. Moreover, the participants accompanied their affirmations with body movements. Invited at the beginning of the game to sit on the floor, during the dialogue the participants began, to the researcher's complete surprise, to accompany their words with gestures: some began to lie down completely autonomously, others walked around the room, others took off their shoes. This led them to the discovery of the possibility of “learning in movement” and to experience the educational context in a different way, after years spent sitting at desks. Finally, the closing comments collected for research at the end of the game support, practically unanimously, the idea to continue proposing activities involving the body and movement.

Preliminary data implies that explorations in body movement are among the possible activities connected to the processes of orientation because changes in the participants' posture generated dynamic and flexible responses which defer directly to the aesthetic style, that is, they are sensitive to relationships. In fact, the body in movement re-connects and re-unifies the “here and now”, allowing the learning subjects to experience a chance to rethink the things they know in a different way and to discover new aspects of themselves.

#### Self-knowledge through Movement: the search for a posture in movement

To move oneself means to learn, starting from one's birth. There is a deep connection between movement, emotions, perceptions and thoughts (Lakoff, 1999). These

interactions develop in the body through the senses, which are different modalities for coming to know the world and the self. To describe this awareness the term embodiment is used. Embodiment transmits the idea of body as a symbolic construction which is not disconnected from gesture and movement. The body rebuilds itself continually and is always ready to accept new information. According to these theories “to be connected with” is a fundamental dynamic for the acceptance of disorientation and “disorienting dilemmas” and to generate transformative learning. No perception exists outside of action and “as far as actions change, perception of the world changes too” (Varela, Rosch, Thompson, 1993).

In this perspective, the body seems to be a “situational space” to explore and know in relation to other spaces. For this reason, possible developments in research will be aimed at analysing the ideas of body “posture” and “presence”. This prospective, applied to orientation, means to study the transformative effects of dis-orientation through the creation of a method based on the body movement (Feldenkrais, 1991) from an autobiographical point of view (Josso, 2000). If formation is to be defined as “transformative” and “sacred” it will require learning spaces where dis-learning can be experimented with, because through the awareness of one's habits – both mental and bodily – subjects can open themselves up to their own creative existence.

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**Supporting Transformative Processes.  
The Role of Microanalysis for the Professional Development**

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**Abstract**

This paper analyzes and discusses - through a few examples from a study on interactions in an infant-toddler center - the theoretical and methodological aspects of transformative learning, focusing in particular on the potential of the microanalysis of some daily moments as part of the educators' professional development.

**Seeing (oneself), transformation and change in educational actions. Some preliminary theoretical considerations.**

Pedagogical reflection has long highlighted the complexity of teaching. It is a job that requires the development and maturation of a professional identity able to act independently, creatively and innovatively, but also responsibly, being very attentive and "thoughtfully present" (Mortari, 2003) to the signals that come from the "field". Educational professionalism is multi-faceted and therefore never definitive (Massa, 1992), not "constructed once and for all" outside of the places where education happens. Rather it is always *in progress* and requires the constant integration of emotions and meanings, theoretical knowledge and practical skills, the personal and relational dimensions. In this sense to speak of educational *competence* implies "the notion of borders" (Cambi, 2004, p. 24), which encompasses several dimensions: that of knowledge (cognitive level), skills (operational level) and experiences (emotional sphere).

This is particularly evident in educational contexts for children, where these three dimensions (cognitive, operational, emotional) are strongly interconnected and overlapping (Mantovani, 2003; Braga, 2009) in the daily life consisting of complex, dynamic, unpredictable and culturally connoted relationships (with children, adults, children and adults together) that require flexible planning and knowing how to act immediately quickly, yet not without reflection (Braga, 2009). If we think about training educators within these contexts, it is necessary both to support the ability to observe, read and interpret situations, and to observe and listen to oneself by reflecting on one's own actions in a less "automatic" way, especially questioning and reflecting *on* one's models, and not *starting* from them.

In line with these considerations on the need to be able to "reclaim" one's own structures of meaning and action, transformative learning theorists have long stressed the importance of recognizing and moving away from, at least temporarily, the "structures" which often latently condition our ways of acting and thinking. Not surprisingly, the theory of Transformative Dimension of Adult Learning introduced by Jack Mezirow (1991/2003) is now considered a "classic" within the international debate on education and adult learning.

This thesis highlights how the socialization processes that take place throughout life gradually bring the individual to internalize symbolic models that influence their way of perceiving events, situations, moods and act accordingly. Being aware of such models, which typically remain at an unconscious level, proves to be very important when one is faced with the need to give meaning to their experience, the way one acts and interprets events. And this need occurs mostly when the "usual" behavior models

(culturally prescribed and socially acquired), according to which one has always acted, prove inadequate. It is in the gap created by this mismatch between old patterns and 'new reality' that already constructed learning has the opportunity to become *transformative*, because the reality until then taken for granted must be subjected to a critical review process (Dewey , 1910), able to transform - through reflection - perspectives of meaning and action patterns.

The reflection process is a spiral process, which never occurs 'once and for all' , but needs to be periodically repeated upon the recurrence of a critical situation (Dewey, 1910, 1938), "reflection involves a critical examination of the way we consciously, deliberately and consistently applied ideas in organizing [...] and implementing the different phases of the solution to a problem" (Mezirow, 1991/2003, p.104). According to Mezirow - and here is the main difference from Dewey – it is a matter of thinking of this process of critical analysis not only as a reviewing and restructuring of action strategies used to solve a problem (problem solving), but to discuss the conditions that led to the posing of the problem ("on which structures of meaning, in which profound categories of significance, are certain situations and behaviors perceived as difficult / problematic/critical?"). The *transformative* potential of learning, therefore, lies in the ability to question, analyze and critically review both content and experience as "our premises and our efforts [...] to give it meaning" (ibid.). This ability allows one to become more aware of their way of life, while at the same time it offers the possibility to go *beyond* awareness, to acquire greater flexibility of thought and openness to new forms of adaptation / re-adaptation to new and changing conditions of life. This is an aspect of particular interest in reflecting on teacher training and specifically in discussion and research on methods for training teachers involved in early childhood contexts, where - as mentioned above - the emotional and relational dynamics are heavily involved and made even more delicate by working both with children in the early stages of life and with their parents.

Regarding the promotion of more critical and conscious thought, theories based transformative learning - as well as other studies of a psycho-pedagogical character (consider the series of studies on narration, or research on social representations, not to mention the field of psychotherapy) - assign a central role to language, seen as a tool for the construction, deconstruction and restructuring of reality. It is possible to encourage adults to make use of language to conceptualize their experience, objectify thoughts, impressions, experiences and internal emotional states, as well as to critically examine their own interpretations, subjecting them to a dialectical process with other perspectives and points of view. In doing so - according to what Habermas (1981/1986) would call a form of "communicative learning" - would widen the "conceptual mesh", the "interpretive filters" (Caronia , 2011), through which, phenomenologically, we observe and give meaning to the reality that surrounds us. Next to language and the transformation of experience made through narrative, another central aspect is the dimension of memory and its objectification, meaning those processes that allow one to reconnect to a past experience, emotions (past and present) connected to it, allowing one to operate, in retrospect, a critical re-evaluation of their models, their expectations and the thought patterns used Stern (1995 , 2004). This sphere is very present in the reflections developed in clinical and psychotherapeutic fields. Different forms of reflection come into play in this process of reviewing and transforming action patterns and perspectives of meaning: the evocation of a problem / situation (reflection on the content of the experience), the description of the action process (reflection on the solution strategies used), the

reconstruction of the premises (reflection on assumptions). Thanks to the combination of all of these levels (Nuzzaci, 2011), one can realize that potential, defined by Habermas (1976/1979) as "the emancipatory power of reflection", which Mezirow (as cited in Pulvirenti, 2009) describes as the "transformation of old perspectives of meaning into new more inclusive, permeable perspectives and open to alternative viewpoints" (p.131).

For these reasons, "although not all of adult education involves reflexive or transformative learning, reflective learning - and therefore transformative - would definitely be considered one of its primary goals" (Mezirow, 1991/2003, p.115). At the theoretical level, there are many psychological and pedagogical studies that in line with these considerations, attributing to reflexivity (Schön 1983, 1987; Formenti & Gamelli, 1998; Shacklock & Smyth, 1998; Nuzzaci, 2011; Striano, 2001), to metacognitive processes (Metcalf & Shimamura, 1994) and to the promotion of awareness (Braga, 2009), a decisive role in the training of those who work in educational settings.

Doing research / training services means, in this logic, helping educators to question their own contexts and experience, to review and question the premises underlying their own actions, transforming the daily educational work into "living hermeneutics" (Riva, 2004), in a space and time devoted to the reconstruction of the experience as the basis for discussion, to revise and rethink the "frames" (Bateson, 1972), so often tacit, that guide the ways they act and interpret events. To date, the need to develop additional methodological guidance on how to provoke, support, document and analyze (Bove, Braga & Cescato, 2014) these processes of taking "consciousness" (Formenti, 2007), both individually and in a group, is particularly acute within the pedagogical debate.

One of the problems that the training processes [...] have to deal with [in fact] relates to [their] ability [*how*] to develop the skills acquired in certain contexts, to transfer them to situations that are not yet addressed or operational contexts that differ more or less strongly from those already familiar (Pellery, 2007, p.305).

Based on these preliminary theoretical considerations, I will try to explain - from a few examples - the pedagogical salience of some tools/methods (Bove, 2009) that offer interesting clues to promote, support and monitor educators' processes of reflection on action during some "moments" or "special events". More precisely, I will investigate how critical analysis - first through the memory and the narration of an event, then through a video recording followed by the review and discussion of the images with educator protagonists, activates and accelerates the initiation mechanisms of reflection, critical review and singles out ideas or implied pedagogies, all the above of particular interest in the reflection on transformative learning that I am proposing.

The thesis I suggest is that the design of the setting and training-research devices that promote and accompany microanalytical investigation of the experience (so the analysis of behaviors, emotions and thoughts related to a particular educational moment) could represent a way to link the different aspects (pragmatic and hermeneutic, cognitive and emotional) of reflection on their work, encouraging observation and the redesign educational practices, not to mention reviewing the frames of meaning that are deep inside and underlie behavior and the way situations are interpreted.

### **Micro-transformations. A sample analysis**

The examples we will discuss below are part of an exploratory research project conducted in the field of child pedagogy and studies of preschool services. The study

(which was a "pilot study" on the method) focused on some situations and interaction dynamics between adults (parents and teachers) and children during arrival and departure times at the nursery (Cescato, 2012) and was based on the assumption that the complex dynamics of transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) could offer an opportunity to analytically reflect on and review - with the educators - those dynamics and those assumptions that affect the daily work of education and that today appear particularly challenged by the cultural complexity and variability (Favaro, Mantovani & Musatti, 2006) that characterizes our services.

The theme of the relationship between services and families – from a long time at the center of the pedagogical debate - is also an aspect which, perhaps more than others, invites us to question the role of reflection as a tool for the profound renewal of educational practices and patterns of meaning.

It is an undeniable fact that the realization of pedagogical principles and guidelines (such as building a climate of trust, collaboration, co-education between services and families) cannot be reduced to "standardized " patterns or behaviors, but needs to be built "from the inside", from the comparison with concrete situations that support educators in recognizing their positions, accompanying them at the same time to question and revise certain interpretive frames and viewpoints that structure their actions in the relationship.

The aim was therefore to develop a research project, closely related to the training of the participants (Bove, 2009), which tried to rethink the issue of relationships between services and families starting from the interactions (Hinde, 1976) between educators, parents and children that occur during arrival and departure times from the service, and then - through them – to go back to the nature of cultural interaction rituals (Bove & Cescato, 2013) and the world of "internal representations" (Stern, 1995) that guide, in unique and subjective ways, how to communicate and stay in the relationship among people in educational contexts.

The aim of this study was therefore to rethink the issue of relationships between services and families from the "here and now" (Stern, 2004) of specific moments of educational events, in other words the size of observable interactions (Hinde, 1976), and then, through them, to go back to the nature of cultural interaction rituals (Bove & Cescato, 2013) and the world of "internal representations" (Stern, 1995) that guide the modes of being in a relationship in educational contexts in unique and subjective ways.

From a methodological point of view, the study intertwined instruments traditionally used in educational field research with methods from clinical trials regarding the microanalysis of interactions (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Corboz-Warnery, 1999). The basic idea was to add value, from a pedagogical point of view, to the "possibility of change" (Stern, 2005) - and therefore the *transformative* value - that the observation and discussion of "a given moment" (Ibid.) could offer to educators in terms of reviewing and critically assessing the experience.

Specifically, the study involved the eight teachers of the "nido" chosen as context for the study in several stages of: observation, interview, focus groups, video and reflection.

The study was divided into three phases: in the first phase explored the educators' representations and ideas regarding relationships with the families through informal interviews and group discussions. During the second phase, we investigated the individual teachers' representations on interactions with children and parents during the moments of arrival and departure more deeply, using individual micro-analytical interviews. Based on the method originally developed by Daniel Stern (1995, 2004) in

his "interview on the present moment"<sup>8</sup>, he asked each teacher to focus on two exemplary transition episodes, one of a "critical" and the other of a "positive" interaction. The episodes, which were recent - so as to avoid losing the vividness of the memory - were reconstructed as a narrative by the educator, guided by the interview questions to dwell on the situation as much as possible, describing what happened and reconstructing the behaviors, thoughts and emotions experienced at that time.

The purpose of this micro-analytical narrative reconstruction based on memories was to "delve into the subjective aspects of the experience of the individual participants" (Carli, Pintarelli, 2002, p.109), offering them a way to reconnect the content of experience to meaningful structures, behaviors, subjective internal ideas, relative to their way of *being in* relationships (Stern, 1995).

In the third phase the teachers, videotaped interacting with children and parents during arrival and departure times<sup>9</sup>, were invited to review together (each with her own class colleague) clips of some scenes, to discuss them in the light of the more or less "critical" judgments attributed to the observed interactions and to try to reconstruct / reconsider the *reasons* underlying these judgments.

The "critical-reflexive reconstruction" exercise - first mediated by memory (the second stage of the study) and then by images (third stage) - seems to have allowed the teachers to reflect more on the personal component put into play during interactions (both narrated and live) and to reconstruct more analytically, observing and recalling the micro-dynamic interaction processes that everyday (day after day) involved them *with* the children and parents in an attempt to build "good relationships".

### **Observing and documenting micro-transformations**

One of the research outcomes that I find most interesting to discuss, in line with the theoretical considerations presented in the first part of this paper, is the "formative echo" (Bove, 2009) produced by critical rebuilding moment by moment where the teachers reflected on their acted representations (Stern, 1995) during daily interactions with children and parents. The concept of *acted representations* is particularly interesting because it combines the representational dimension with that of behavior, re-evoking the strong link between "the ways of being in connection and the dimensions, of meaning and emotional, that influence way of being in a relationship" (Ibid.).

We followed some transformative changes in terms of representations related to one's own actions, in the words of an educator involved in the research-training experience described above.

The example I propose to dwell on is that of Marta, one of the protagonist educators. We can observe the changes discernible in her way of describing and conceptualizing

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<sup>8</sup> In *The Motherhood Constellation* (1995), Stern introduced the micro-analytical interview, presenting it as a particular procedure to bring out and explore, in addition to overt interactions that take place between mother and child, the mother's ideas with respect to the her relationship with her child. The parent is invited to focus on a particular "critical" moment of the interaction and to describe "everything she saw, heard, thought and did" at that time (Carli, 2002, p.109). The objective is to "remain on the experience as long as possible" (Stern, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> During the study, 100 episodes were videotaped during arrival and departure from the nido. Among the videos – shot in 2 classes with children between 12 and 36 months - a representative sample of 40 video clips was selected, transcribed and analyzed. Some clips relating to scenes deemed by teachers to be particularly significant (in terms of being a "critical or positive relationship") were shown to the teachers who (together with the class colleague) watched and discussed them together.

the relationship with families and her way of being in a relationship.

During the early stages of the study, the predominant element of her narrative was the description of "hard work " in the relationship with the families, traced to a strong focus on the parental figure and an interpretational rather than descriptive reading of their behaviors.

a) On the one hand, the parents were represented - as often happens in services (Formenti, 2000; Milani, 2001) - in negative terms, or by excess or defect : undecided, absent, or too present and supportive.

b) On the other hand, the relationship- in which arrival and departure were described as the most important moments in laying the foundations for collaboration - was mostly conceptualized in terms of dyadic interactions, between parents and children or between educators and parents.

The teacher's attention, in the vein of classic studies on attachment (Bowlby, 1969), was primarily focused on attachment methods and styles, considered more or less safe within the parent-child pair. In other cases the trend of arrival and departure times fell into the parameters of greater or lesser security, trust and willingness on the part of parents towards the educator.

Some excerpts from the interview transcripts and moments of discussion with Marta effectively exemplify these issues.

*"Certainly - said the teacher, showing a particular centering on the attitude of parental figures – the parents' attitude is essential for building a good relationship and trust. [...] Sometimes , however, it is difficult [...] On the one hand you have indecisive, insecure mothers who spend too much time in the classroom. [...] On the other hand there are parents [...] who are uncooperative, or too hasty, [...] who come and go [...] almost without stopping"*

In this description we can see the dichotomy between "insecurities" and "uncooperative/hasty" attitudes, those "binary lines" - as Bachtin (1975) would call them - that allow us to observe the semantic categorizations of interpreting reality in her discourse and that - in Marta's case - refer in particular to the parental figures.

These ways of categorizing returned, albeit in a slightly different way, when the teacher tried to describe what she thought was most important to support during the child's transition from home to school. Once again, the behavior of the parent and their insecurities seem to be a key point for the teacher, a point which greatly influences the quality of relationships (parent-teacher and parent-child).

*"In a good transition - claimed the educator - availability and relaxed time are important [...] . Having the opportunity to reassure parents, their anxieties and uncertainties [...] definitely helps things and makes the transition easier." On the other hand, "the parent-child relationship is fundamental, [...] [because] if the attachment style is insecure and the parent is undecided, they ends up conveying all their anxiety to the child."*

During the later stages of the study, the teacher chose some interaction situations with the families that she considered particularly critical, in order to review them and discuss them together. The transcriptions show a change of pace.

a) We can note the gradual approach to less generic, "stereotyped" discourse. The posture of the educator appears to be more questioning, critical and reflective , especially regarding herself and her role .

b) We begin to glimpse at a more descriptive and less interpretive/judgmental level of reflection towards the parents. The teacher still refers to them, but she also starts to talk about the *behavior* of children and their parents and about her way of greeting the pair.

Particularly interesting are some passages in which the educator - reviewing a clip of a scene of welcome (which she had previously defined as "critical") - begins to wonder about the reasons for her judgment. Reflecting on her own thoughts and emotions seems to bring into focus her internal relationship model, which she recognizes as excessively leaning towards the adults (teachers and parents). *"Initially - she affirmed after reviewing the footage with a long dialogue between her and a mother - I described the scene as critical because I thought I was not able to reassure the mother sufficiently . [...] I remember that I was upset and didn't know what to say."*

We note here, as Marta has begun to wonder about her goals, her concerns at that moment. Microanalytically lingering on the clip lets her see her 'primary concern' , drawing her inner experience closer with images from the video. It is interesting to note that this process leads her to consider how she was *"concentrated on talking with the mother that she had not noticed how the children, meanwhile, were trying to get her attention."*

The tension and worry of that moment which emerged and were identified by microanalyzing thoughts, emotions and behaviors - were then questioned and problematized .

*"I realized - continued the educator - that anxiety prevailed [...] and that kept me from noticing everything else."*

If at the beginning there is the pure recognition of certain aspects of some behavioral dynamics, afterwards the reflection becomes critical: there is not only the observation of gestures, postures, behaviors, but an attempt is made to reconstruct and review what was behind them.

Recall and reconstruct its internal state indeed leads Martha to recognize their hard work , fear ( prevailing at that time ) not to find the words to relate with the other adult ( parent) in the delicate transition of educational responsibility . All this is accompanied by a distancing of the box and shake the foreshadowing of new openings for action.

*"Reassuring the parent - concluded Marta, rationalizing and reviewing her own schemes - [...] is important, but this can also be done at other moments". "[...] In the end- she considered - there are also meetings with parents. [...] While in the morning the children need you to be there [...] and facilitating their arrival and autonomy are, in fact, important goals"*.

It is interesting to consider how the reconstruction of their own experience and their expectations at that moment (in the "there and then" of the situation evoked) and their comparison with a retrospective review of the scene (in the "here and now" of the analysis) fostered and accompanied one the one hand the emergence and the 'mobilization' of some aspects, such as the recognition of the 'relativity' of their emotions and expectations and how considering them affects the way of being and acting, but also – on the other hand - the awareness of the fact that it is possible to distance oneself when reviewing and reconsidering one's own priorities.

*"I realized - Marta significantly concluded at the end of the course - that sometimes I need to detach myself from my prejudices and fears, and simply observe."*

### **Conclusive insights**

As argued in the first part of this paper, the theories that are based on transformative learning consider memory, verbalization and discussion of the experience interesting methodological ingredients in order to stimulate and accompany processes of gaining awareness and making a critical review of the adult's models (cultural, educational,



personal).

The example we discussed illustrates the possibility of resuming and revisiting these issues, both together with other tools (such as video recording) that combine observations of behavior with the narrative reconstruction of meanings, as well as in the *micropedagogical analysis* (Demetrio, 1992) of the educational experience, that moves from studying and magnifying precise moments of daily life to go in search of the connections between these moments and the meaning that they take on for their protagonists.

Dwelling on the recollection of specific episodes - as shown by clinical research (Stern, 1995, 2004; Pianta, 2001) – permits going *beyond* a "widespread", generalized, static narrative that is somewhat stereotypical of the experience of relationships, enabling the emergence of internal representations related to it.

As we have seen with the example of Marta, going back several times and in different ways (through memory, observation and discussion) to a *precise* moment of interaction with a parent and child during the arrival time gave the educator the opportunity to evolve her own narrative with respect to the issue of the relationship with the families, reviewing her own parameters and judgment criteria. Repeatedly going back to an experience allowed her to "mobilize" the experience itself.

On the one hand, in fact, the micro-analytical character of the interview led to an articulated reconstruction of the episode, in which – in addition to the description of the scene – an initial re-evocation of the teacher's thoughts, emotions, and experiences educator at that moment was associated.

On the other hand, the video recording and discussion of the micro-positioning of the child, parent and educator allowed returning to the episode, this time on another level: no longer through the filter from memory, but through the observation of behavior, rendered observable through video.

This allowed a further transformation in the gaze of the educator, who – seeing herself in action - could compare her idea of the event with that offered afterwards by the video. She was able to realize how personal prejudices and fears sometimes affected her way of being in relationship and interpreting interactions.

This discourse - which also applies to the other teachers involved in the study - leads us to consider the educational potential of the micro-analysis of daily educational for initiating *transformative* processes of reflection of the experience.

For that matter, as Mezirow said, " it is through reflection [that] we see [...] the traditional logic with which we have interpreted the experience of everyday life, in order to critically re-examine the implicit claim of validity advanced by a pattern of meaning never before questioned" (Mezirow, 1991/2003, p. 104).

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**The Impact of Educator's Transformational Leadership in Second Chance Schools (SCS) to the Perspective Transformation of Dysfunctional Assumptions of Learners**

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**Abstract**

This paper presents the findings of an empirical research concerning the effect of transformational leadership of the educators in the Second Chance School (SCS) in Ioannina on the perspective transformation of the 'dysfunctional' assumptions of the graduates.

Second Chance Schools as an institution in Greece, (Law 2525/97) came to realize stated goals of lifelong learning (White Bible, 1995), which were basic principles of educational policy developed within the context of institutions and agencies of the European Union's strategy of further education and training, as well as the strategy to combat social exclusion through education (at least initially) and socio-cultural development. They are alternative public schools where their philosophy, structure and function are dictated by the needs, interests, capabilities and motivations of adult learners who are over eighteen years old, and they haven't completed compulsory education. The Schools aim for a comprehensive approach to their needs (Κόκκος, 1999). The SCS seek through leveraging diversity and the experiences of the trainees to encourage them to new learning experiences in order to lead them to the strengthening of critical reflection and self-reflection and to the "holistic reconsideration of the way they perceive, think, feel and act" (Kokkos, 2007, p.11), i.e. transformative learning.

Adult learners attending the SCS carry a wide stock of experiences, which are a crucial factor in their learning, especially when many of those experiences are the product of an uncritical acceptance of the influences of socio-cultural environment that restrict how they think, act and feel and inhibit new ways of learning, perception and behavior. Therefore, the primary role of each adult educator is the personal empowerment and emancipation of the learners, and the enhancement of the framework of their problematic interpretations and beliefs. Instructors, undertake a leader role, which facilitates and strengthens the learning in order to contribute to the transformation of dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions, while transferring the power to the trainee group/class to help adult learners realize their potential to make, critically thinking, more informed choices (Mezirow, 2007, p.68).

In recent years, there exists a significant amount of research on transformative learning in adults. Mezirow & ass. (2007) in their study illustrates the most advanced research paradigms that were conducted internationally as well as their contribution to the progress of the theory and practice of the transformative learning in diverse educational contexts. Additionally, in a recent study Taylor (2007) presents published research papers, and 45 unpublished research papers, mostly, doctoral dissertations, from the period of 1982 to 1998, while the study is complemented by subsequent investigations by Wilhelmson (2002), all of which are investigating the relationship of transformative learning and the lifestyle of adults and/or changes in their careers. These research papers cover a wide range of empirical data and focus on critical thinking, while they investigate the role of context in adult learning and other ways to learn, up to how transformative learning can be supported in an educational environment (D'Amatoa & Krasnyb, 2011; Kreber, 2006; Franz, 2005). There is also

an increasing level of research concerning transformative learning of adults in Greece, mostly master thesis (Psaromallou, 2008; Partheni, 2009; Gotzamani, 2009; Lapokonstantaki, 2010; Konstantopoulou, 2010; Manoyra, 2011). A fair amount of this research involved the SCS settings.

Research on the adoption of transformative learning in groups in the workplace, was conducted by Choy (2009), while Laine (2008) investigated the trust in the Superior-Subordinate relationship and the contribution of the transformative learning in it and similarly Seltzer & Miller, (1990) researched the relation of leader behavior to subordinate empowerment in the context of a human service organization. In addition, there has been research into the transformational leadership in and its relationship with learning mostly in working places (Harrison, 2011; Nemanich & Vera, 2009; Amitay, Popper & Lipshitz, 2005; Dum Dum, Lowe & Avolio, 2002; Bass & Avolio, 1993) and in the education field as well, while a research by Paulette Gabriel (2008) highlighted the important role of transformative learning experiences in the cultivation of transformational leadership characteristics of executives in companies. However, there is a deficit of research regarding the impact of the transformational leadership theory and the role of educators in the perspective transformation of the frame of reference of the adult learners.

Based on the above problematic it was decided to investigate the relationship intersection between the theory of transformative learning and the transformational leadership. Specifically, it was studied whether the transformational leadership of the educators in SCS can contribute to the transformative learning of adult learners and specifically: If the educators at SCS present characteristics of transformational leadership, to what extent, and how can these engender transformation of the dysfunctional assumptions of the trainees, as reflected in the perceptions and experiences of graduates of the SCS of Ioannina.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mezirow (1991) believes that on the level of educational practice the reinforcement of the process of transforming uncritically structured perceptions and expectations of adults, in which experiences, critical thought and communication based on rational dialogue hold a catalytic role, is important and necessary for adults. Its significance derives from the fact that it enables them to be driven in awareness and extricate from dilemmas imposed by external conditions. Such a process, may lead them to "gain autonomy which is a crucial condition of adulthood" (Koulaouzidis, 2008, p.25). The theory of transformative learning, therefore, "seeks to explain how adult learning is structured and plans to identify the processes by which the frames of reference against which we perceive and interpret our experiences can be transformed" (Mezirow, 1991, p.11)

As Mezirow (2007) argues the transformative process begins when the frame of reference is found in disharmony with a confusing problem or dilemma that will confront the student and this process usually develops gradually (p.60). According to Robert Boyd (Lintzeris, 2007, p.30), people in these situations can trigger forces of self-awareness in order to solve problems that complicate their lives and cultivate more functional traits in their character. Achieving change is of course the product of conscious decision and responsibility, but the adult educator is the one who according to Cranton (2007) is "called upon to shape the individual personality of the trainees, who until they gain a clear picture of themselves, will be limited to the extent, they fully and freely engage in thoughtful dialogue" (p.231).

One of the most important aspects of the role of the adult educator is implementing

personalized pedagogical approach, (EU in Vekris, 2010, p.17; Cranton, 2007) along with enabling each learner or a group of learners to make options that are closer to their experiences and trying to open new paths in order to provide alternative ways for the acquisition of knowledge (Dirkx & Lavin, 2003, p.7). Meanwhile, the instructor not only acts as a role-model and shows willingness to learn and change but also behaves as a source of new challenging ideas for the learners, which motivate reflection on old modes of action and contribute to the development of problem solving skills (Heron in Kokkos, 1999, p.302). She (sic) activates a process of redefining the human experience through a meaning -giving procedure (operating as part of the process of critical reflection), which leads to transformation. The trainer must demonstrate *charisma* (ability to provide vision and mission of exercise), to *motivate the learners mentally* (encouraging innovative solutions) and to provide them *personalized care* and personal attention and to each individual separately, elements that are characteristics of a *transformational leadership* (Dumdum & al., 2002; Avolio, Bass & Jung, 1999; Seltzer & Miller, 1990).

Burns in his book *Leadership* (1978) introduces the term transformational leadership to describe the 'leadership' that makes changes and transforms (transforming leadership). He focused particularly on the moral dimension of leadership and the leader's ability to inspire, to encourage, to stimulate and to guide the members of an organization at the highest levels of performance in an objective. The development and refinement of the theory was the instrumental work of Bass (1985), who connected leadership with the transformative action of a leader who provides vision (transformational leadership) with emphasis on the change that is achieved on subordinates (Bolden, 2004: 11; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Seltzer & Miller, 1990).

Transformational leadership responds to the current needs of the labor groups that want inspiration, encourage and empowerment through their leaders to perform (Bass & Riggio, 2008; Northouse, 2007) and their features can be acquired through education (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bass, 1990). Regarding the education and the school environment, transformational leadership is consistent with enhancing creativity and initiative of teachers, within a framework of continuing education, and aims to create a collaborative climate among students, fostering a safe democratic dialogue and encouraging collective action (Moos & Huber, 2007). Sergioivanni (1992) states characteristically that "in communities (such as school) leadership and learning go hand-in-hand" (p.40). Besides, as it tends to be widely adopted recently, teachers are considered 'leaders' of the learning and the teaching process in their school classes (Gronn, 2002).

This vision of leadership cancels old, entrenched perceptions, which are linked to the hierarchical system, while expanding the bounds of leadership and is facing the school as a learning organization, where the leadership as a dynamic activity is thus an influencing interaction process (Franz, 2005; Sarojni, 2009; Laine, 2008; Biniari, 2012). With these data the surfacing contradiction between the concept of leadership and the process of transformative learning, as described by Mezirow, who stressed that the role of the adult educator is not being a leader, ceases to exist if the term leadership is not used in the sense of sheer prestige or position of authority, but as an exercise in a dialectical interaction for learning and particularly for the transformative learning of learners, thereby promoting their need for self-actualization in an educational context of 'relational knowledge', as is the one that SCS profess on, which is characterized by relations of equality, freedom of expression, mutual support and avoidance of confrontations of opposite poles (Belenky in Kokkos, 2011, p.99).

Assuming that the transformational leaders are able to awaken and inspire people with

the power of their own excitement, that they do not order or command but on the contrary they show strong belief, vision and develop cooperative relationships (Goleman, 2000, p.113) and they energize people to change, addressing in the sense of the meaning and value they have within themselves (Daft, 2004; Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2005), they are essentially the ideal trainers for an innovative organization, such as the Second Chance Schools (SCS), and could potentially support the transformation of the frame of reference of learners and facilitate their personal transformative learning.

### **Methodology**

During the school year 2012-13 a qualitative research was conducted with semi-structured research interviews on a sample of 14 graduates from the SCS of Ioannina in successive years between 2008 and 2013. The participants, eight men and six women were selected on the basis of the wide dispersion of age (28-52 years) and the diversity of their family and professional situation. The choice of data collection on the same experience of different subjects at different times sought to achieve triangulation of data time (Denzin, 2006) and the raw material was processed by the content analysis methodology.

### **Research Findings**

From the content analysis of the transcribed interview two themes of array research questions were formed from the raw material. The first focuses on the characteristics of transformational leadership and their impact on the perspective transformation of the framework assumptions of learners. The second deals with the transformation of the reference frame of the graduates of the SCS of Ioannina, in which a range of perceptions and experiences are reflected, which have significant variations in the relationship between them and the degree of interaction to the transformative learning of learners. These themes are presented below:

#### *Features of Transformational Leadership of the Educators in the SCS of Ioannina*

As the narratives of the experiences of students who graduated neither from the SCS of Ioannina show, not all instructors, nor to the same extent holds transformational leadership characteristics. Others are role-models and a source of inspiration and vision and are highly valued and trusted, while others are scorned for their behavior and attitude:

LR2: Well, yes. There are teachers who I want to be like. Okay this is hard to do, but I want to take out too goodness, courage, strength, and then, when we talk they make you believe that you are somebody. That you're not nothing...Sometimes a couple of them make me dream whilst awake. It's nice even if it is just a dream. You don't feel empty. They give you a purpose, something. ...The one that I mention listened to me...She treated me like an old friend, like a sister and even better.

LR4: This vision that they give us is what makes us fight...otherwise we would have quit... They are trying to give us confidence to continue.

LR10: They were wonderful people who gave me inspiration, they reinforced me whenever fatigue and frustrated, they stood rocks for me... Yes they gave me a vision; they made me believe that I can achieve my goals. To be truthful since I started school I never had high goals... And they gave us goals and courage and trust on difficult times.... I received help and care many times and I am grateful for that.

LR5:I don't want to blame anyone, but not everyone is the same... you know, when the other party is bored, then you flinch to ask for something.

LR8:Some are worthy, and I appreciate them...I know they will advise for the best... These I trust. But not all of them have experience...Not in skills but in life.

LR11:I don't know what to answer, there are some who can uplift you high and you start to see a different way of life and imagine that at some point it will all be well worth it but then again! When you don't know to answer a which has been answered many times again, but you still don't know it you don't remember, they say:"haven't you still learned it?" and then you fall from the clouds and the dreams and fantasies vanish.

*Transformation of the Frame of Reference of Students who have graduated from the SCS of Ioannina*

In the domain of the frame of reference transformations and dysfunctional beliefs and assumptions of learners - graduates of the SCS of Ioannina, eight participants noted changes/transformations. Some found and recounted transformations that happened after a confusing problem, a disorienting dilemma or an experience which was repeated, and caused them emotional interactions which eventually led to the critical evaluation of assumptions and in a differentiated way of understanding their position in society, in a form of mental action.

Others referred to the stock of knowledge, self-confidence, their self-perception as learners, their motivation for learning, self-esteem. Possibly some or all of these changes have occurred without any transformation, because according to Kegan (2007) "all of these changes may have happened to the existing scheme or frame of reference" (p. 88). Regardless though, if these changes derive to an extent from the learning process, or are real transformations, involving fundamental reshaping of assumptions, the learners themselves ascribe them to a big degree to the transformational leadership of their instructors.

Furthermore, the degree of the influence of transformational leadership on the transformative process depends on several critical factors that inhibit or prevent the build up of trust and confidence of the learners with their instructors even if those instructors possess traits of transformational leadership. The cases focuses were those where the narrative of the participants describe a transformational process and not simply a change. Characteristic are the examples given below, concerning:1) the disorienting dilemmas changes/transformations, 2) the importance of the characteristics of the transformational leadership of the educators to the learners and 3) the factors affecting the transformative process.

*Changes /transformations:*

*Under the frame of reference on how to manage family and social relations.*

LR5: My thinking changed... I don't know how it happened but it happened slowly, to give you an idea, I now sit and talk about with my children and my husband much more than before when I had more time. Now I prefer to leave the dishes unwashed, to sit down to discuss. They weren't used to so much talking and it seems strange to them.

Disorienting problem/experience transformational leadership of educators (vision).

I saw that here we are talking about everything like a family... as they should do in a family. And I thought, "here we are discussing at the school and we are all strangers and we all agree. At home they are my people and we aren't talking? Is that good? They (instructors) taught me this...to think, by their



example in the classroom. They don't get angry, even when we are wrong...we just use discussion."

*Under assumptions concerning beliefs about collective solidarity and mutual support.*

LR2: I don't know about all, but this... to ask for help, started when I had a family problem that was connected to my school attendance. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to talk to teachers. I was hesitating; I wasn't familiar with doing such things. Not that I considered it bad but my parents always told us not to talk about our family to others....

Disorienting problem/experience-transformational leadership of educators (personalized care).

Anyway, when I arrived to a stalemate I thought enough is enough, a teacher took me privately and asked if something worries me, if she can help... and stuff like that. I felt weak, I was moved and told her, what was bothering me. Anyway long story, but she was there for me she helped me. This gave me great pleasure, but I was somewhat shaken, it made me feel bad... but it made me also angry that I was tormented for so long and I didn't say anything. Then I contemplated...I talked for hours with my teacher...Teachers tell us not to hesitate to ask for their help and that they will do the same too if needed. This I considered very important, is like saying "I trust you; I believe you are equal to me." And then they create the climate, the atmosphere, we were taught how to operate... to listen to each other, to feel, to extend our hand to help, to stand by, to put goals... we simply follow.

*The characteristics of their personality in the field of communication and cooperation, tolerance and acceptance of diversity:*

LR11: I see many things differently. It isn't all black or white, there is gray and shades. I figured this here, I was absolute in some things... but it isn't so. Things..., situations, people have many facets...

Transformational leadership of educators (role-model, vision, individualized care, intellectual stimulation).

The teachers who showed us all...most...patience and love. You know how good that is?...they taught me to think and to dream. That can also be a bad thing. It will show in the future...

LR4: I can discuss without getting angry now. I learned to listen to what others say. Not that I always agree, but I'm working it on my mind and sometimes I see that they are right.

Disorienting problem/experience - transformational leadership of educators (role-model).

And for some teachers I appreciate them...And when some misunderstandings happen in the classroom, that is no big deal, they listen and discuss it. I would get very angry before that. Now I think about it and I don't get angry immediately. It's better. We don't break our hearts.

LR10: My perceptions on many things changed e.g. racism, racial discrimination, political choices, a lot...

Disorienting problem/experience - transformational leadership of educators (role-model).

I'll tell you about the racist stereotypes...I think I was racist...Like many others I used to watch with an evil eye...I was wary of strangers, like most. We had in my class two or three people. I considered them inferior. I could see that the teachers didn't distinguish them, they regarded them as equals. Originally

this used to fidget me, I was angry with the teachers, but in the course I was angry with myself and my ideas, because I found that those people were very good, with one of them we became best friends... We did a lot of discussions in the SCS on topics of social concern; I saw many things with a different perspective.

*Perceptions about the necessity of education, the goals and career choices.*

LR4: I see education with a different perspective. I used to say, schools and fairytales. Life is a school and money. If you make money, education isn't required. Now I understand that it is. And that one must have purpose... If I had a high school diploma, when I should have it, I would have more work points and I could be in a good job today. It is a totally different situation when you have diplomas, but you have to have goals and go for it.

Transformational leadership of educators (intellectual stimulation).

School startled me; I say that on a good sense. Feels like home coming into a program that can tire you, but also gives you a purpose, I cannot express it, uh... you like life but it doesn't treat you like it should. ... Teachers are trying, to give us confidence to continue... Somehow they manage and make us forget our problems. And I trust them.

LR12: I... converse better, trying to accomplish things... to make it into whatever I plan that I used to be fearful of before. Generally I have new courage and I loved education, the school... I miss it...

Transformational leadership of educators (role-model, vision).

I had a teacher as a role-model, I wish her the best. This teacher not only adorable... Well, this woman gave me vision with what she was saying. She made me feel I had strength and confidence that everything would be alright. Every time I have a problem I recall her... "what she would do? Would she give up? No. How would she cope with it? "And I find the solution. What she used to say? "Nothing is difficult if you want something and you fight for it. If you really want something, the whole universe conspires to succeed."

*Self-image, self-concept.*

LR6: I think we all changed, I can say about me I see every day differently, with more optimism, courage, I say "I can do it" and miraculously I do. My day is different; I want to go to school. I gained confidence, I feel like I was elevated... and others respect me more, I can see that.

Transformational leadership of educators (intellectual stimulation).

Our teachers are telling us to work together, to stand to each other, to plan our lives.

LR8: ... I feel I am doing something. Not just work and coffee shop... We talk and I say to myself: "How do I come up with things to say". Before I flinched to express my opinion, and now I say. Why are the other people opinions any better?

Disorienting problem/experience - transformational leadership of educators (intellectual stimulation).

... I don't know, it was rather a problem for me that I couldn't talk even when I had an opinion. Somehow I wasn't sure, like I was kept tied... I don't know how to say it. I listened to others talking all the time... and teachers never said to them "what are you talking about." Why for that matter they didn't always say the right things, but I couldn't. Then once in the course the teacher asked me to say my opinion, I was ashamed and I talked, I said what I had in my mind and the teacher said "Well done", so said that's right... and then the others

agreed. Then I said to myself "it isn't terrible to speak my mind, when I have to say something that is meaningful"...and so it happened.

*Factors affecting the transformative process:*

*Socioeconomic background - lack of prospect/unemployment.*

LR7: To give us vision now? We are done buddy, we're done. Those with the money have vision. Us poor have nothing, not even a plate of food sort of speak. ... What role-models would I have...They (educators) are in a different situation, than me. They have been educated...they have their job...I have nothing, only my hands, if I can work, I can eat, otherwise...

*Gender (women are much more susceptible to transformational processes).*

*The age of trainees and educators.*

LR1: Does the wolf change? How to change my life now that I am old... or

LR8: How can someone (educator) help you if he has no life experiences (very young)? How can he help me? I am not sure, but I don't trust him...

*The motives of study (when the motivation to study in the SCS was only the practical necessity of a diploma, the transformative process didn't work).*

*The personal attitude and responsibility.*

LR13: I don't believe that I changed in anything and I don't want to change.

My friends say the best things about me. Why change?

*Low self-esteem and negative self-concept, self-image.*

LR7: What goals could we set? Most of us are uneducated...it's been years since we left school and we forgot what we learned.

The findings highlight the important influence of the characteristics of the educators' transformational leadership to the strengthening of the self-concept of learners and to the critical assessment of their assumptions, after a disorienting dilemma or an experience that created unpleasant feelings, and ultimately to the transformation of their dysfunctional frames of reference. Even when there is a lack of transformation this does not related with the educators but it is considered to be related to the effects of the current economic crisis or the negative self-image, their age and generally the diversity of situations and people.

## **Discussion**

The investigation verified the hypothesis and the expectation that the characteristics of transformational leadership of the educators are positively associated with the facilitation of the transformative learning for learners. The educators as role-models, the providing of vision, the solicit for targeting, the support, the encouraging of dialogue, the emotional understanding and sincere interest to learners about how they think and feel while creating a protected learning environment to remove the power relations, activate the critical reflection of learners towards modification and change of the dysfunctional frame of reference. These findings have also emerged from researches of Mooney (2011), Seltzer & Miller, (1990), Choy (2009), Layne (2008), Partheni (2009), Gotzamani (2009), Konstantopoulou (2010), Lapokonstantaki (2010). It was found, however, as in the investigation of Manoura (2011) that gender, motives to study in the SCS, the negative self-image and even age (teachers and students), economic and political conditions, lack of perspective social, professional and economic insecurity, traumatic experiences, are crucial factors for building a climate of security and trust with their educators and sometimes disruptive foe the process of transformative learning. In addition, the strengthening - improvement of the self-image of the learners by enhancing self-confidence, self-esteem and self-

respect is the foundation of change - transformation of old ideas or modes of action, testing of new roles and ultimately transforming problematic frames of reference, a finding consistent with that of Manoura (2011) and Mooney (2011).

Also it was interesting to find that despite the transformational leadership characteristics, which may be available to instructors, not all learners have the ability or experience to externalize thoughts, feelings and assumptions or are able to participate in activities related to cooperation and thoughtful dialogue to create the conditions for the realization of the process of transformative learning, findings that are indicated to other researches as well (Choy, 2009). As it is characteristically mentioned by Fullan, (2001) people change when they have the opportunity to present their views, to become partakers of new ideas, to test and monitor others or to cooperate in designing new practices.

In addition, the view of Cranton (2007, p.220) that diversity of psychological structure affects the process of transformation of beliefs of trainees was verified and as the survey of Virgo (2011) revealed, the transformation may occur in a few individuals, even if the entire team is involved in the same learning process.

On the other hand, the need for continuous and timely training of teachers of the SCS emerged, especially towards the strengthening of the characteristics of the transformational leadership so they can realize that "teachers who are leaders lead within and beyond the classroom, they are integrated and contribute to a community of teachers, they are both leaders and learners influencing others through the improvement of their teaching practice" (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001, p.5). The necessity for further investigation on the factors affecting the contribution of transformational leadership to the transformations of learners is also of great importance.

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**Adult educators: Transformed when transforming**

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**INTRODUCTION:** The present research studies whether and to what extent trainers-researchers working on the notion of trainees' transformation, adopt transformative logic in the way they themselves deal with their personal teaching reality. The objective of the present research is to contribute to the further strengthening of transformative theory. To this end, the research tool selected was the Focus Group, with 7 trainers-researchers [hereinafter TR]. In this context we analyzed their viewpoints and tried to identify any personal transformation on issues pertaining to their attitude vis-à-vis the learning process. As for its theoretical foundation, the research was based on Mezirow's and his colleagues' views, as formulated in his main book *Transformative Learning* (2006, Greek Edition).

**Theoretical framework of the research:** The methodological tool used is the Focus Group which has been described as basic research to contribute to fundamental theory and knowledge (Patton, 1990). Focus group methodology is an in-depth, open-ended group discussion that explores a specific set of issues on a predefined topic. The participants are usually a homogeneous group of people who are asked to reflect on a series of questions. Such group consists typically of between five to eight participants and convened under guidance of facilitator. Group interaction is an integral part of the method, with people encouraged to talk to one another, asking questions and commenting on others' experiences and views (Kitzinger, 1994b).

The Focus Group in question consisted of 7 TR, 5 women and two men. The group was considered homogeneous with the following common characteristics: a) educational experience, b) participation in methodologies utilizing art in education, c) post-graduate or other paper (research experience) on topics related to transformative learning through art. It is worth mentioning that research papers written by the participants during 2008-2014 studied the effectiveness of methodologies introducing art in education on various levels (cognitive, communicative, reflective, transformative). For this reason the interview questions focus on the topic: art and learning. In the context of the present research however, it was deemed interesting to study whether the TR adopt a transformative way of thinking for themselves. The researchers coaching the focus group played the role of mediator and facilitator, that is, mediating between the questions and the theory and facilitating the effective functioning of the group (Robson, 2007:337-346).

**Collection of research data:** The group discussion lasted three (3) hours and was recorded in total, with the consent of all group members. Written notes were taken by one researcher and the interviewees gave written answers (personal documents) in basic questions. The analysis and interpretation of the research data followed the procedures of quantitative analysis, specifically the content analysis technique. Classification categories for the written text were established (Kyriazi, 1999), based on the axes of the theoretical part which were the following:

1. Initial and final assumption of the TR about the role of observing works of art [hereinafter WofA] in the educational process.
2. Initial and final assumption about the development of critical thinking through observing WofA.

3. Initial and final assumption as regards the development of transformation through observing WofA.
4. Future plans of the TR for a substantial and meaningful learning process.

Based on the above axes, the main research question was formulated as follows: *Does the transition from an initial to a final viewpoint on the role of art in the educational process bear the features of transformative logic?*

All axes apart from the 4<sup>th</sup> (which is more general) focus on views by the TR pertaining to the role of observing WofA in the educational process. The methodologies applied by the TR were the following: Visible Thinking Project, Perkin's Methodology of observing art (1994), Transformative learning through the aesthetic experience (Kokkos, 2010). These methodologies are based, apart from art, on basic characteristics or Transformative Learning: critical thinking on various themes, reflective dialogue, well-formed and rationally documented expression of an opinion. In any case, in the research done by the TR there are elements of trainee transformation as regards certain dysfunctional views. However, the object of the present research was to check if the transformative logic (that they sought in their trainees) affected unconsciously their way of thinking.

**Data analysis:** Content analysis was selected as the tool to encode the sample's views. For each answer given by the TR, key words and phrases were identified, corresponding to the content of each question put to them. Then we sought the relevance of these key words and phrases to the transformative logic. Each answer characterized by transformative features as defined by Mezirow (2006) is considered as a transformative logic answer.

### **Presentation of results by axis**

**1<sup>st</sup> axis:** In the context of the first axis, we studied the transformative pathway of the TR in relation to their perceptions about the role of observing WofA in the educational process. Then we studied the disorienting dilemma (DD) of TR, the self-examination of TR's emotions, the TR's critical assessment of initial assumptions, as well as new knowledge, attitudes and skills that the sample has acquired following the adoption of new viewpoints about the role of art.

#### **→ Initial assumption about the role of observing WofA in the educational process.**

*Main points:* The initial assumption about the role of observing WofA in the educational process is stated unequivocally. Entrenched perceptions are the rule: "Art and education are not related (1)", "There is no relation whatsoever (2)", "Art in the educational process is seen as an independent module: e.g. teaching of art (3)", "Art is used only in school celebrations and events (4)", "Art is a personal enjoyment and not a means for diffusing information (5)", "I thought art as an aesthetic result by virtuosi artists (6)", "I had never thought art may produce reflection (7)". In parallel, two members of the sample expressed some broader views: "I used the WofA in the books



for starting a discussion (8)".

*Conclusion:* The sample had a clear-cut initial assumption according to which art is mainly an independent field and is not actively involved in the learning processes.

→ **Final assumption about the role of observing WofA in the educational process**

*Main points:* The final assumption about the role of observing WofA in the educational process is stated either generally or more specifically. In the first case, we come across phrases such as: "It has a lot of benefits(9)", "It is a systematic part of the educational process (10)", "It broadens one's horizons (11)", "It empowers(12)". In the second case, more specific assumptions are expressed, mainly as regards horizontal skills, such as: "I have seen that it cultivates creativity, an alternative way of looking at things (13)", "I have seen that it helps communicating and expressing one's emotions (14)", "It develops horizontal skills(15)", "The trainee develops his aesthetic capacity in a more conscious way (16)", "The trainee cultivates his reflection(17)", "It clearly produces reflection(18)", "The trainee is thrilled with what he experiences, mainly with the fact that he sees art working completely differently. Even just observing one more WofA and not just going by it, is a benefit(19)", "Personally, I am happy even with less: that is, that my trainees spend more time observing a WofA (20)".

*Transformative logic of answers (hereinafter TLA):* The transition from the initial to the final answer shows that the sample has shifted from an absolute perception about the role of art (points 1,2,3,4,5,6) to a broader (points 9,10,11,12) and more justified view, documented by experience (points 13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20). Even more so, the sample recognizes specific horizontal skills that the trainees develop as they observe WofA. This approach corroborates Mezirow's opinion about the essence of critical thinking. "Critical thinking encompasses a logical justification of actions" (Mezirow, 2007:59). Moreover, the general answers (points 9,10,11,12) can be identified with what Mezirow considers as "intuitive justification" of the role of art in the educational process (Mezirow, 2007:59). That is, the TR express the feeling of a general benefit arising from that process.

→ **Disorienting Dilemma (DD)**

In the context of the research, a DD is considered a dissonance between what the TR taught and what they ideally wanted to teach. The phrases used to define the teaching reality before getting acquainted with the methodologies of observing WofA, point to a neutral and limited process (cognitively, emotionally, communicatively and reflectively): "I felt restricted, uninspired, I was teaching but I felt limited (21)". Equally characteristic are the phrases defining the DD: "That was decisive for me: that is, to use in an educational context what I love: art (22)", "It was an emotional awakening (23)", "I realized that art is not only its aesthetic result, but also the reflective process to reach this (24)", "Art is not only an experience. It is a systematic learning process with reflective results (25)", "Art is something deeper than

superficial observation (26)".

Moreover, it was observed that the sample followed both forms of DD. That is, both the "*seasonal transformation*" and the "*gradually increasing transformation*" of habits of mind (Mezirow, 2007:60) are observed. Specifically, the seasonal transformation was stated as follows: "Working on my PhD with Mrs. Mega has specifically helped me to realize certain things about art (27)", "In 2010, Mr. Kokkos came to Themi to present the book 'Education through art' and I was shocked (28)", "Mrs Kalogridi advised me to read various articles with a similar content (29)", "I attended artit (30)".

The *gradually increasing transformation* was observed through phrases such as: "Until now I used to see the result of the project my trainees worked on. Now I see in a measurable way how their perspicacity and reflection are developing (31)", "In the past we tried to place the artist in some movement, whereas with the observation methodologies we focused on critical thinking, on the 'why' behind the artist's choices (32)". Viewpoints 31, 32 and 33 were expressed by two members of the Focus Group who are art teachers.

*Conclusion:* The DD was present in its two forms, seasonal and gradually increasing transformation (Mezirow, 2007:60). The subjects who, due to their profession, are more familiar with arts experience the DD more intensely. That is, through the application of methodologies of observing WofA, they gradually discover that the pathway to reach the final aesthetic product of WofA is equally important and, even more so, this pathway contains features of critical thinking: "...the methodologies introducing art as a factor of critical thinking add value to art (reflective) and this shocked me (33)".

*TLA:* The sample experienced a DD (21,22,23,24,25,28). Later on this led to the transformation of a problematic field of reference through the adoption of methodologies introducing art into education. The problematic field of reference was the uninspired, emotionally deprived learning process (21). The DD prepared the mental and emotional ground of the TR, so that they listen to viewpoints which take them out of this deadlock in an active way (seasonal DD 27,28,29,30). Moreover, the new transformed perception about the role of art was justified through experience itself (gradually increasing DD 31,32,33) where the TR-art teachers realized indeed the reflective aspect of art.

➤ **Self-examination of emotions**

*Main points:* Negative emotions were defined, such as anxiety, shame and insecurity. Positive emotions were also defined, such as enthusiasm and curiosity. Moreover, it was ascertained that the new methodologies provided solutions to the initial teaching deadlock that the sample experienced. "I was thrilled that we had this possibility for a renewed way of teaching (34)".

The anxiety the group experienced can be characterized as a creative one, since due to

that the TR sought more information, but also advice as to how to apply the new methodologies. At the same time, educational weaknesses emerged, unrelated to the new methodologies, but rather to the sample's perception of their role as trainers: "I felt insecure about the way my trainees would view the new methodology (35)". "I feel weak as to how to apply correctly the Socratic method; I usually miss my objective (36)". Phrases with a reflective content were also noted: "You need to overcome your insecurity, because maybe even just one of your trainees will benefit from this process (37)", "You need to seek solutions to your problem, to dare (38)", "When you have insecurities and fears, you need to learn something more and not get stuck with those [insecurities and fears] (39)".

*TLA:* The sample's choices (37,38) show that they overcame their emotional limitations. That is, they make an effort to delineate the problem (identification of negative emotions) and to face it (35,36). The processes put in place by the sample to handle their emotions corroborate Mezirow's view about undertaking action (39) with a transformative orientation: "*Undertaking action based on reflective perceptions often involves the overcoming of emotional limitations, something which possibly demands new learning experiences in order to move forward*" (Mezirow, 2007:62).

#### **→ Critical assessment of assumptions**

*Main points:* Entrenched views were assessed, either as regards initial assumptions about the role of art in education, or as regards emotions.

Studying the first question (Axis 1, 1<sup>st</sup> question) revealed that art is not compatible with learning processes and more specifically is not compatible with the development of critical thinking (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8). The assessment of this assumption was done in the following ways:

*-Reflection on teaching:* Phrases such as the following permeated the thoughts of the sample: "I was preoccupied with how I would introduce my trainees to this new methodology and whether they would accept it (40)", "Two days before entering the classroom I was thinking about how to talk to my trainees about the new methodology (41)", "How am I going to win over someone who is negative? (42)", "What if they tell me 'Who are you to ruin our lesson? (43)". In fact, both the sample and the trainees make the assumption that learning is cut off from the mechanisms of a holistic development of the personality (such as the arts).

*- Reflection on the process of learning – unlearning:* Phrases such as "I am capable of ...(44)", "I will be able to get things over (45)", "I will manage to handle the dialogue rules (46)" have been identified.

*- Reflection:* One of the subjects (who had expressed the DD in a gradually increasing way) revealed a reflective attitude in his way of thinking: "Am I thinking in predefined norms, should I think about education in a different way? Are there alternative ways of learning? (44)", "In fact I am questioning myself (45)". Reflection was present when the sample tried to seek help in order to overcome their dysfunctional assumption: "I tried to find more books (46)", "Mrs. Mega coached me (47)", "I attended conferences and workshops about this topic (48)".

*Conclusion:* The sample expressed themselves in a reflective way, based on three axes: the teaching, the learning and the reflective (metacognitive) one. That is, we observed a transition from the specific (teaching) to more holistic bestowal of meaning (learning and reflection on the learning process), when they were asked to remember how they coped with their dysfunctional assumption about art.

*TLA:* The transition from the specific to the more holistic viewpoints on the value of art is a process of transformative logic. From the sample's phrases, especially those referring to handling negative thinking (40,41,42,43), it is clear that the sample is characterized by a will to change their attitude (44,45,46,47). According to Mezirow (2006), transformative learning encompasses the dimension of a will to act (Mezirow, 2006:63). The assessment of assumptions is defined exactly as in Boyd's critical reasoning and logic (1991:198), who states that *personal transformation comes first with the acknowledgment of the dilemma's dimensions to ourselves and then handling it as a difficulty to overcome*" (Mezirow, 2006:61). Here, too, the sample state clearly their will to act (41), they acknowledge the problem first to themselves (44,45,46) and the difficulty to be overcome (45,46,47,48,49). Therefore the sample does not assess in a negative light their former assumption, rather they compare it to the new perception about the learning process, which they find more meaningful and broadened (44).

### **→Acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes**

*Main points:* After coming into contact with the new methodologies, the sample has reinforced all three axes:

Knowledge: they acquired a non negligible amount of knowledge, from reading and attending seminars and conferences. Some characteristic phrases: "I sought more information from...(50)", "Thorough knowledge of the topic helped me (51)", "I learned to recognize genuine works of art (52)".

Skills: they learned to apply the rules of reflective dialogue, to prioritize their objectives, to implement methodologies in an organized way. Some characteristic phrases: "I am closer to my target (53)", "I have been helped methodology-wise (54)".

Attitudes: We observed: a) building of self-confidence, e.g. "I have acquired a lot of self-confidence, whereas in the past I was more shy", "I was anxious about how to present it to my trainees, but in the end all this anxiety was useless, they were thrilled (55)", b) active participation: "The more I try it, the more reflection we get out of this process (56)", c) adoption of principles of communicative learning, e.g.: "In practice I have seen that trainees were relieved we came closer (57)", d) adoption of adult education principles, e.g.: "I am one of them, learning with them and reflecting (58)".

*Conclusion:* The knowledge the sample acquired helped them to face the dysfunctional assumptions about the value of art in the educational process, mainly enriching it. The skills regarding the application of the methodology increased, too. Mainly, the sample developed a positive attitude vis-à-vis the methodology.

*TLA:* The following elements of transformative logic were identified in the sample: a) self-reliance of thinking: this is a process which, according to Mezirow “leads to a deeper understanding of the assumptions on which perceptions and emotions are based” (Mezirow, 2006:67), (50,51,52), b) Constant thinking: this is about “the dialectical discourse the individual wants to have with himself in order to embrace new practices or to question dysfunctional views” (Mezirow, 2006:67), (53,54,56), c) Getting out of traditional habits of mind: This is what Kegan calls ‘investigation of experience through various viewpoints’. The latter thinks also that “learning is achieved completely when the learner gets out of the traditional habits of mind” (Kegan, 1994:232 in Mezirow, 2007:67), (52,55,57,58).

**2<sup>nd</sup> axis:** Here we study the transformative pathway of the TR as regards their perceptions of the relationship between critical thinking (CT) and observing WofA.

→ **Initial assumption about the relationship between CT & WofA /general approach**

*Main points:* The initial assumption for the development of CT through the observation of art is stated unequivocally. Phrases such as “No way (59)”, “Unattainable (60)”, “Impossible (61)”, prevail, whereas one alternative statement was given “No way, except for literature and poetry (62)”, as well as a reflective one: “I was judging superficially (63)”.

*Conclusion:* The sample seemed to have a clear-cut negative view about the development of CT by observing WofA.

→ **Final assumption about the relationship between CT & WofA /general approach**

*Main points:* The final assumption about the development of CT by observing WofA is stated in a flexible way: “Yes, it can be cultivated, but...(64)”. Moreover, the following prerequisites are given, without which CT cannot be developed by observing WofA: a) Sound knowledge of methods of observing WofA (65), b) Time needed to develop CT (66), c) Systematic use of methodologies (67), d) Maturity of the group to develop CT (68). At the same time, the sample agrees that CT is a complex process expressed in various forms: Pluralism (69), Expression and acceptance of views (70), Perspicacity (71), Holistic approach (72), Readiness for a reflective mood (73).

*Conclusion:* The sample considers that CT is produced, but under certain conditions related to the role of the trainer (65,66,67) and the role of the educational group (68), as well as with each individual's personal pathway (72).

*TLA:* The transition from one answer to the other bears the features of a critically thinking individual (Mezirow, 2007:53), since the sample in their final assumption provide more accurate and integrated information (65,66,67,68).

→ **Initial assumption about how CT is cultivated / focused approach**

*Main points:* The initial assumption about how CT is cultivated by observing WofA is stated unequivocally with phrases such as: “It cannot be cultivated (74)”, “Basically, it cannot be cultivated (75)”. However more specific ways are proposed, too: “Some opinions are expressed during the lessons of Language and Civic Education (76)”, “It is cultivated through group discussions (77)”, “With brainstorming, questions, and answers (78)”.

*Conclusion:* The sample had a limited perception on how to cultivate CT, focusing generally on active educational techniques and appropriate themes for the beginning of a reflective dialogue, placing the emphasis on the trainer's skills.

→ **Final assumption about how CT is cultivated /focused approach**

*Main points:* The final assumption about how CT is developed, is stated in a flexible way: “Various viewpoints are heard (79)”, “We co-decide about the theme we will work on (80)”, “Active participation is promoted safely: all opinions are heard and respected (81)”, “We leave space for expression of personal experiences (82)”, “We link the theme to daily life, e.g. Picasso's Guernica and violence in the cities (83)”.

*Conclusion:* The sample had a broadened view about how to cultivate CT, which includes the trainer's attitude vis-à-vis his trainees.

*TLA:* The transition from one answer to the other bears the features of a critically thinking individual (Mezirow, 2006:53), since the sample in their final assumption are interested in: a) the emotional understanding of others and how they think and b) equal opportunities for participating in the dialogue (79,80,81,82,83). Consequently, the trainer's attitude has moved from the 'I' (level of knowledge and skills) to the 'We' (83,80). According to Kegan, this transition is a basic indication of reflective maturity.

**3<sup>rd</sup> axis:** Here we study the sample's assumption as to whether we witness transformation of entrenched views through observing WofA.

→ **Initial assumption about the development of a transformative mood through the observation of WofA /general approach**

*Main points:* The initial assumption is negative: “It is difficult (84)”, “With

difficulty...(85)", "It is not easy...(86)", "Difficult case (87)", "Impossible (88)". In parallel, prerequisites for the development of a transformative mood were given, pertaining to the role of the trainer and the trainees. This role has to do with the knowledge and skills of both. The trainer must "select the appropriate WofA (89)", "be charismatic (90)", "allow for all views to be heard (91)", "simple observation is not enough (92)". On the other hand the trainee must "be feeling ready (93)", "be at the right age, and have the maturity and culture (94)".

*Conclusion:* The sample was cautious as regards the development of a transformative mood by observing WofA (84,85,86,87,88). They also believe that both trainers and trainees must be equipped with knowledge and skills in order to start thinking in a transformative mood (93,94).

→ **Final assumption on the transformation of entrenched dysfunctional viewpoints**

*Main points:* The final assumption about the transformative mood of trainees through the systematic observation of WofA is stated in a reflective way: "I don't know if we have transformation, but the foundations for transformation are laid (95)", "The trainee's commitment to change must be checked (96)", "There is a chance for transformation (97)", "Can someone face one's assumptions and judge them? How open is he to that? (98)". On the level of attitudes, too, it was observed that the transformative mood is developed under certain conditions: "Can the trainees face their assumptions? (99)", "How mature are they? (100)", "Can they reflect deeply? (101)", "Are they open and ready to accept? (102)", "Can they commit themselves to the decisions they've made? (103)". Another important element is the reflective perception of methodologies. It is not a panacea, but one of the prerequisites for transformation. Phrases such as the following exemplify this: "There is no transformation, but the foundations for its development are laid (104)", "It's a dowry (105)", "It's a possibility (106)".

*Conclusion:* The sample had a reflective perception about the development of a transformative mood by means of observing WofA. Reflection focuses on the trainees' role as regards attitudes (100,101,102,103), as well as on the role of methodology, considering it an element of a transformative pathway among many others, acting as a facilitator and not as a catalyst (59,97,104,105,106).

*TLA:* The transition from one answer to the other bears the features of an individual thinking in a transformative way (Mezirow, 2006:56). Habits of mind with an epistemological content about the trainer's role are transformed (89,90,91,91). In their final assumption, the sample leaves aside the trainer's knowledge and skills and focuses on the trainee's attitude for the achievement of transformation, considering it more important (98). In the same line of thinking, the epistemological assumption about the method's value is changing, since it is not a learning model, but rather one

of the many elements of transformation (106). Moreover, the transition from one answer to the other bears the features of a critically thinking individual, mainly as regards independence from coercions (104) (Mezirow, 2006:53).

→ **Initial/Final assumption about how TL is achieved /focused approach**

*Main points:* The sample was divided in two categories: The first one includes those for whom contact with the TL theory occurs at the same time when they learn about the methodologies to develop CT and Transformation through art. In this case, the initial lack of education regarding TL is acknowledged and the following ways are identified in order to develop it: “Development of CT so as to transform assumptions (107)”, “Promotion of transformation through alternative viewpoints (108)”, “Promotion of transformation through commitment for implementation of new choices (109)”. A prerequisite for the above is “the trainees’ emotional security (110)”. An interesting case is one where the initial assumption for the development of transformation without any theoretical framework supporting it, resembles a lot Mezirow’s reasoning: “*I was seeking transformation through reflective dialogue. However I did not want my trainees to transform dysfunctional views-points of my trainees (because I didn’t know such a pedagogical theory exists). I just wanted to convey my views on a topic through dialogue with my trainees, a dialogue based on reasoning*”. “*Now my trainees express their assumptions, they transform them and commit themselves to their new choices (111)*”.

The second category consists of one individual who was familiar with transformative logic before becoming acquainted with the theoretical position that art also contributes to transformation. In this case, dialogue is acknowledged (112) as the core of transformation (Mezirow, 2006:50-55), whereas art is an additional tool for the trainer.

*LTA:* In the answers given about the initial and final assumption of how transformative mood is cultivated, we have seen two transformative steps as described by Mezirow (Mezirow, 2006:50-51). Specifically, the following have been identified: a) Critical assessment of assumptions (107,108,109), b) Widening variety of choices for new roles, relationships and actions (111,109).

**4<sup>th</sup> axis:** Here we study the broadened and meaningful learning that the trainers intend to provide to the trainees.

*Main points:* The sample expressed views about a substantial and meaningful learning process. In this sense, the TR consider that a substantial learning is one that allows the trainees “to develop their horizontal skills (112)”, “to deconstruct the notion of right and wrong (113)”, “to think deeper, more reflectively (114)”, “to not criticize the opinions of the others (115)”, “to examine a problem/theme/question in all its aspects (116)”, to learn with joy, devotion, emotional expression (117)”, “to understand that deep observation as a process can be used over and above the framework of observing a WofA, that is, that they can observe deeply an event, a problematic situation, a viewpoint and not necessarily a WofA (110)”.



*LTA*: The views above corroborate the definition of transformative learning, as formulated by Mezirow (Mezirow 2006:350), while at the same time the notion of metacognition prevails.

## Conclusions

The results of the research contribute in reinforcing the view that transformative processes as defined by theorist Mezirow, affect the trainer's habits of mind. After using in his daily practice transformative or reflective processes, the trainer's way of thinking is broadened. Specifically:

- ✓ Whereas the initial assumptions about the role of art are presented unequivocally, the final assumptions are presented with a justification of actions or intuitive justification. The same logic permeates the initial and final assumptions of the sample as regards the activation of critical thinking through art. This approach corroborates Mezirow's opinion about the essence of critical thinking. "Critical thinking encompasses a logical justification of actions" (Mezirow, 2006:59). In addition the transition from one answer to the other bears the features of a critically thinking individual, mainly as regards independence from coercions (Mezirow, 2006:53).
- ✓ The transformative process (Mezirow, 2006) was expressed repeatedly when they experienced disorienting dilemmas, processed their emotions, assessed critically their assumptions and broadened their experience getting away from the traditional habits of mind. More specifically:
  - The DD prepared the mental and emotional ground of the TR, so that they listen to viewpoints which take them out of this deadlock in an active way.(Mezirow,2006:60)
  - The sample make an effort to delineate the problem (identification of negative emotions) and to face it. The processes put in place by the sample to handle their emotions corroborate Mezirow's view about undertaking action with a transformative orientation: "*Undertaking action based on reflective perceptions often involves the overcoming of emotional limitations, something which possibly demands new learning experiences in order to move forward*" (Mezirow, 2006:62).
  - The sample state clearly their will to act, they acknowledge the problem first to themselves and the difficulty to overcome. (Mezirow:2006: 63)
- ✓ The sample expressed three kinds of transformative logic a) self-reliance of thinking (Mezirow, 2006:67) b) Constant thinking: (Mezirow, 2006:67) c) Getting out of traditional habits of mind: This is what Kegan calls 'investigation of experience through various viewpoints'. (Kegan,1994:232)
- ✓ Finally, the sample acknowledges that a substantial learning process is much more than acquisition of knowledge and skills. It is mainly metacognition, deconstruction of traditional notions such as right and wrong, alternative viewpoints, emotional expression . (Mezirow, 2006,350).

**Discussion:** We can draw the conclusion that the 7 trainers-researchers have been influenced to a great extent by the transformative logic they applied to their trainees. They even followed some basic steps of the transformative pathway, as they had to face disorienting dilemmas, dysfunctional assumptions, critical processing of the above and commitment to a renewed and more meaningful educational action. If such

is the state of things, then we need to investigate even further whether the trainers' profile is affected and to what extent by the practical application of the theories they use. If indeed there is an influence, then the responsibility of educational theorists becomes even greater, since the dynamics of a theory seems to go beyond the learning process per se and invades and shapes the trainer's personality.

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## **The processing of perceptions of education students at the University: A composite approach through transformative learning and constructive-developmental theory**

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### **Abstract**

This paper refers to the way teachers develop their perceptions on the teaching process and the way in which those perceptions determine their attitudes. Based on a qualitative research in tertiary education, we examine through transformative learning theory and the constructive-developmental approach, the possibility of transforming their assumptions.

### **Introduction**

In our days, the discourse on the necessity of revising the traditional ways of learning is increasing constantly (Jarvis, 1996· Rogers, 1996 & 2003· Brookfield, 1983· Illeris, 2009). The common ground of the opinions expressed is that in order to achieve any change in the learning process, the crucial starting point is the re-evaluation and development of the teachers themselves. Teaching is a highly social profession and is influenced greatly from the socio-economic and cultural framework of the specific historical moment. When that framework changes, the profession of the teacher changes accordingly (Neave, 1992).

In order to confront the contemporary issues deriving at the educational, professional and personal level, it is necessary to overcome the segregation and the segmentation of the educational process (Karalis, Sotiropoulos and Kampeza, 2007). The continuous education of teachers takes place in multiple frameworks, which extend beyond their initial training. According to the typology of Coombs (Coombs, 1968· Coombs and Ahmed, 1974), the educational and training processes can be included in one of the three types of education, formal, non-formal and informal education. Informal education includes all frameworks in which individuals acquire knowledge, competences, attitudes and values from their daily experiences and their environment, from their family, their neighborhood, their work or entertainment, the labor market, libraries as well as the media.

Taking this typology into consideration, we realize that the teacher is exposed as a learner to multiple frameworks. In our country the initial education of preschool and elementary teachers takes place in departments of tertiary education. Apart from their formal education (in university departments), teachers are also a subject of non-formal forms of education (seminars, trainings etc), as well as informal education. All three types of education play a decisive role. However, informal education is of great importance, although the validity of this type of education could be questioned as it is not provided by an organized educational institution, is still affects the professional identity of the teacher in a permanent way, while shaping perceptions and assumptions which influence their educational practices (Karalis, Sotiropoulos and Kampeza, 2007: 150-151). This effect can take place either through the social framework (family, friends, acquaintances, media, etc), via the educational domain (school,

administration, colleagues etc), or through prior experiences from the field of education. The latter is attributed to the fact that teachers are exposed to various practices throughout school and student life, from which they draw models, attitudes and behaviors as their own practices are formed (Greene, 1991).

However, it is possible that the attitudes, models and values that teachers adopt are distorted, leading to the configuration of dysfunctional practices. Particularly in the Greek framework - which has a long history in the teacher-centered way of education - this effect is of decisive importance in the reproduction of deep-rooted practices and in strong resistances to the application of innovative methods. Consequently, the students' opinions regarding the learning process can influence and shape their attitude in the future, when they themselves become teachers.

We could say that their proper preparation during their studies, including the development of critical thinking and questioning existing perceptions, constitutes a decisive element for the configuration of these new teachers, who will be prepared and open-minded towards new methods and innovative practices.

In order for this shift to occur, it is necessary for the new teachers to go through processes of critical examination and reflection of their entrenched perceptions which could possibly function as a barrier to their professional growth in the future. It is not only previous experiences that support critical reflection and discourse as an incentive for transformative learning, but also the experiences in the classroom. (Taylor, 2009:7). In order to learn from the experience, schoolteachers should have time to reflect on those experiences.

"Having an experience does not constitute learning about it; having an experience and then thinking about it to make sense of it does... Good teaching does not rest on a set of static, prescribed rules and technical strategies. Rather, shifting circumstances suggest teachers be reflective in their approach to classroom practice. Reflective teachers approach teaching as problem solving; they see teaching circumstances and conditions as problematic rather than given, and they approach each situation with an openness to both the known and the unknown" (Richert, 1991: 113-114)

From the above, the necessity of the use of critical reflection practices by university faculty is quite evident, in order to incorporate and transmit any knowledge and experience acquired through the daily practice in the schools.

Consequently, the critical question that emerges concerning the education of teachers, is the development of conditions which support *reflective* teachers, who will have the ability to correspond to constantly changing conditions. For the teachers, participating and learning from their work requires time, opportunity and support. According to Richert, a way of supporting is teaching them how to function reflectively throughout the professional course as well as prior to that, meaning during their education (1991: 114).

As described by Dewey (1933), the reflective teacher regards teaching as a mental objective and not as a routine. The intellectual engagement provides the base of experiential learning, provided that the reflective teacher adapts what he/she knows to the experiences in a changing world. This way, new concepts are created, consequently leading to revised actions.

### **Transformative learning and the constructive- developmental approach**

Established by Jack Mezirow, transformative learning theory refers to learning that involves critical reflection, which may result in transformations of the perception systems of adults. According to Mezirow (2000:7-8) “*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.*”

Mezirow's theory is based on the notion that the way one interprets reality, is determined by the perception system of the individual, the frame of reference. The main issue in adult learning is to help learners reevaluate the foundations of their misconceptions and question the assumptions which have proven to be dysfunctional, in order to shape a more viable picture of reality (Kokkos, 2005: 75-76). Through transformative learning, a rational metacognitive reassessment process of arguments takes place, questioning the assumptions that support problematic points of view or frames of reference, including those representing cultural or environmental factors. It is the process through which adults learn how to think critically about themselves and not accept assumptions that support taken for granted views (Mezirow, 2009: 143-144).

Brookfield (2012:3-5) defines three categories of assumptions: paradigmatic, prescriptive and causal. The causal assumptions include our understanding of how the world functions and what we can do to change it. They connect cause to result and consequently they are explanatory and predictive; they explain the reasons for something happening in the past and predict the consequences of specific decisions in the future. The prescriptive assumptions include our reflective thinking processes about what should happen in specific situations. They are connected to the image we have of someone's role, of the good teacher for example, and how that teacher should react or think. The paradigmatic assumptions structure the world in fundamental categories and they include the deeper perceptions of the individual which shape the frame of reference and the way the world is perceived. Usually their existence is not conscious and the individual is often surprised when realizing that.

Transformative learning “*involves participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight.*” (Mezirow, 2000:8). According to Kegan, it is the subject of “epistemology”, the way we know. Similarly the constructive – developmental approach in psychology examines the natural evolution of forms by which we structure meaning.

The constructive – developmental theory examines the relationship between the *subject* and the *object* in the epistemological approach of the individual. The process of going through the stages of transformative learning includes the passage of the individual from subject to object, the shift from a socialized to a self-authoring epistemological approach (Kegan, 1994: 32-34). Kegan describes “*subject*” as “those elements of our knowing or organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with or embedded in”. Conversely, something that is “*object*” can be a relational issue, “those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other, take control of, internalize, assimilate, or otherwise operate upon” (Kegan 1994:32). Development is the gradual process by which what was “*subject*” in our knowing becomes “*object*”. When a way of

knowing moves from a place we are “had by it” (captive of it) to a place where we “have it”, and can be in relationship to it, the form of our knowing has become more complex, more expansive. (Kegan, 2000:53-54).

According to Kegan (1994 and 2000: 62-63) they are five stages of mental complexity or “orders of mind”, representing five levels of adult cognitive development:

a) *Impulsive mind*: This level involves children 7-8 years old, where the individual realizes the world through the imagination.

b) *Instrumental mind*: the individual functions based on a simple form where meaning- making serves individualistic interests. This stage corresponds to puberty, where the individual is lead by personal wishes and desires.

c) *Socialized mind*: At this level of consciousness, the individual “belongs” somewhere (a team, a social or professional group etc.) and is subject to the interest of that group. Such a person tends to internalize the values or the ideology of the community without questioning them, as well as the expectations the group has towards the individual.

d) *Self authoring mind*: The self authoring mind is able to self define and regulate itself. It can take a step back from the surrounding social system, regarding it as object, but still care and relate to people or groups of interest. The self authoring mind can process circumstances and the expectations of others synthetically, and taking into consideration the individual's value system, it can evaluate, rate and (re) determine his/her behavior, aiming to emancipation.

e) *Self transforming mind*: Apart from the elements of the fourth order, the self transforming mind has learned the limits of his/her internal system and the limits of complete identification of each internal system. Instead of seeing others as different, the transforming mind can locate the similarities that are hidden and that sometimes are perceived as differences. For the adult, the basic differentiation occurs through the transition from the third to the fourth order. For the socialized mind “subject” – what it is run by and identifies with (Kegan, 2000:53)- is opinions, ideas and values internalized through social norms, by which things or problems are perceived.

Whatever changes the *socialized mind* might go through, it will be in perfect alignment with the subject and its very substance. This is still the first “epistemological” process, that of “*meaning forming*” (Kegan, 2000: 52). When such a subject – object relationship is formed, transformation is possible, as according to Kegan, “*when there is no form, there is no transformation*”. (Kegan, 2000: 52). This occurs in the next order.

In the fourth order of the self authoring mind, the change of form is obvious. Through questioning and consequently rejecting the identification with the subject of the third order, the orientation of the process of acquiring knowledge is shifted and now the *subject* becomes *object*. As this change of form takes place, which is the second epistemological process “*reforming our meaning-forming*” and then the form becomes “*more complicated and more extended*”. The *subject* is no longer *the external identification* but *internal authority* that defines itself (Kegan, 2000: 53-58).

Such transformation it can occur at the last order and even to a higher degree, as the transformation penetrates deeper into the cognitive habits, thus making the self authoring mind more effective. It is obvious that as the stages of the constructive – developmental thinking progress, the structures and the types of learning become

more complicated and go under critical elaboration, gradually making the process more and more complex.

### **An application attempt in a higher education department**

A qualitative research that took place from 2008 to 2012 involving students of the Department of Educational Science and Early Childhood Education of the University of Patras, studied a group of 15 students of education throughout their studies. The main concept was to follow the evolution of the group from the beginning of their second year to the completion of their studies. During that period, the students participated in a series of workshops which were designed based on the «Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience» (TLAE) method and on themes relating to the learning process.

The method applied was based on the use of art, in order to encourage and reinforce the development of critical thinking. The aim of the method is for learners to go in depth, analyze and reflect on a certain subject (Kokkos, 2011: 97-100), through the course of its six stages. The key concept of the method is the observation and elaboration of remarkable works of art, offering triggers for the development of the subject at hand. Thus, is the use of aesthetic experience for the promotion of critical thinking.

The students participated in these workshops from their second year to the end of their studies (Raikou, 2013). The first year of the research was dedicated to the design and pilot application of the method, while the other three years mainly involved research through the workshops. The issues addressed concerned the learning process, the role of the teacher, the relation between teachers and learners, as well as designing and evaluating teaching modules.

After designing the implementation of the method and its pilot application during the first year, we moved to the next step of systematically applying the method through a number of workshops, which took place during the second and third year. The aim of the first workshop was *to examine the need for critical thinking concerning the assumptions of the students* regarding the learning process. The first workshop began with an introductory discussion on the main subject which was learning (aims and methods). An attempt was made during this discussion to emphasize on the assumptions the students had formed so far through their experiences in formal educational settings.

Based on the opinions of the students, the subthemes of the learning intervention were determined, as well as the critical questions that would be the subject for elaboration in the upcoming workshops. The subthemes concerned issues such as guidance, discipline and useful knowledge, as well as the development of attitudes and values.

Consequently, the works of art that would be used as triggers for the elaboration of the critical questions were chosen. The criterion for choosing the specific works of art was the fact that they were substantial while at the same time they were easy to elaborate. The latter was very crucial, as the students were not very familiar with art. Furthermore, they facilitated the educational aims of the session providing stimuli for reflection on issues of interest. The chosen works of art were in the form of poetry, fine arts, movies and literature.

During the next workshops, a process of systematic observation of artworks was attempted, as well as the correlation of the emerging ideas to the critical questions, aiming to the critical approach of the student's opinions on the sub-themes determined. Following the stages of the TLAE method at every workshop, in the beginning we posed the critical question to be addressed. Afterwards, the students expressed their initial points of view, followed by the presentation of the artworks and their analysis, connecting them gradually to the critical question.

During the analysis of the works of art, all the members of the group had the opportunity to express themselves freely, regarding the analysis of the artworks and of their points of view on the issue. The multiple and different points of view that were heard during the process reinforced critical thinking and facilitated the assessment of the correctness of the participant's assumptions.

During the last workshop the students re-evaluated their opinions and compared them to those they had expressed prior to the elaboration of artworks. Through the application it became evident that the students changed their perceptions on teacher-learner relations and on the role of the teacher. This change is proven by the elaboration of the students' answers, but also by control exercises comparing them to the answers of other students. (Raikou, 2013).

### **Research findings**

The research data reveals that the majority of students think of the critical thinking process as an intense experience which influenced them on a personal, social and professional level. The points they stressed as most affected concerned the formation of their personal beliefs and the development of exploratory thinking. They reported an improvement in their way of thinking, highlighting details such as the clarity of targets, open-mindedness and receptivity of other views, and familiarity with the process of self-evaluation. Furthermore, regarding the professional level, they pointed out their professional preparation and awareness of their role as teachers. The same students noted that the application of the method was one of the basic elements in forming their personal opinions on the role of the teacher and in reinforcing their understanding of their professional role.

From their answers it is evident that, initially the reason the students chose the specific university department, was mostly the job opportunities they would have upon graduation (Raikou, 2013:299). From the description of the participating groups' profile, it seems that the majority came from a medium-low socio- educational – financial background. Their studies as well as the professional status of their parents demonstrated a need for professional security. This means that finding a job after graduation was vital to them, while the image of working with children was appealing and appeared to be easy and pleasant. It is possible that this attitude could be connected to the fact that the majority of their mothers didn't work and mostly took care of their families (Raikou, 2013: 296-298). This is reinforced by the research findings, according to which almost all the students (14 out of 15) were influenced by their parents, in a direct or indirect way. Furthermore, as they discovered themselves, they were influenced by the positive memories they had as students concerning the role of the kindergarten teacher.

According to their answers, 14 out of 15 students reported that at the beginning of their studies they had a different perception of the teachers' role and the relation



between the teacher and the student. That perception changed during their studies. Many of them had a different opinion, concerning teachers and especially kindergarten teachers. For them, kindergarten teachers didn't qualify as teachers before, but were merely regarded as caretakers of young children. Though the process, they realized the role of the kindergarten teacher as an educator and the work that role involves. According to the factors which affected and shaped their perceptions most, 12 out of 15 students stated that the main factor was their participation in the TLAE method workshops, which in combination with internships helped them realize their role to a great extent. They quote:

*“Before enrolling in the department, you feel you will work with young children, but afterwards your opinion changes completely, because the knowledge we obtain helps us be educators. For sure my opinion, now that I am leaving, is completely different than when I arrived....the workshops helped me very much! They didn't focus on the kindergartens' profession but on education in general. They were definitely a very important factor because they refer to the general concept of the educator”.*

*“The image I had as a student has changed very much, because what I used to have in mind was the image of a very behavioristic teacher, coming to class, giving a lecture without caring if what he said was interesting or appealing to us. But that is not the image of a good educator. The educator should be close to the students, their needs, their interests and their desires. To work with them... The conversations we had helped me, especially those on art, they gave me many ideas”.*

*“I used to have a different opinion on educators, which changed through the workshops, the experiences I had and the various activities I participated in. It goes without saying that I have been influenced by the workshops! The subjects we discussed helped me a lot “.*

*“My opinion on the image of the educator has changed completely. It doesn't have the element of authority it had previously, which is fortunate because that would be tiring after a point. I am very happy about that, meaning that the educator is more uncomplicated and friendlier because I believe it facilitates learning... The workshops definitely influenced me, because we discussed very important issues such as discipline, as well as some impressive works of art (e.g. the “The School of Athens”). I realized kindergarten is not just about young children playing, it is something very important!”*

*“When I began my studies I hadn't realized anything about the role of the educator. There is a stereotype about kindergarten teachers being baby-sitters. I didn't see it that way, but in the department after a while I understood what it is we do... With the workshops I started having a different perspective on learning in general. Perhaps I have started getting more in the role. ”*

### **Cross-evaluation of findings through the lense of transformative learning and constructive – developmental theory**

Through the application example it is evident that a transformation of the students' assumptions concerning the role of the educator had occurred, regarding profile and goals, as well as the relationships developed with learners. Through the critical thinking process, the students reformed during their studies the perspective they had of their profession; the workshops on the TLAE method played an important part in this change.

Considering the distinction of assumptions according to Brookfield, we realize that the process mostly concerned the elaboration of causal and regulatory assumptions. Regarding causal assumptions, the students realized the causes of specific events, as well as the possible consequences of certain decisions in the educational domain. As for the regulatory assumptions, they formed an image of the educator's role and how she or he should work or think. The students elaborated critically their initial opinion of the educator, especially that of the kindergarten teacher, questioning the dominant social norms that defined them until then.

The regulatory assumptions are also connected to the third order according to Kegan, that of the socialized mind. In the beginning of their studies, the students had formed perceptions about the role of the educator, based on prevailing social perceptions. Their values were supported by those norms and assumptions; however they were not visible or had been questioned prior to their participation in the reflective process. Once the students began to examine and critically elaborate them, they gradually started to think about them, to question the taken for granted perceptions and finally reject some of them.

According to Kegan (1994), this gradual transformation is only one of many shifts of the grounded epistemological approach (the form that transforms) that we use to organize meanings. At this point, the students moved from the third order and gradually moved towards the forth, that of the self authoring mind. Through the critical thinking process, they attempted to define and gain a deeper understanding of their role as educators, forming a personal opinion based on their internal choices and the criteria they themselves pose.

As for their assumptions, changes were noted in all the students at different degrees. Regarding a shift to another perception of the role of the educator (4 out of 15 students), either reaching a deeper and clearer understanding of their role (7 out of 15) or enriching their opinions (3 out of 15). The control exercises that were preformed showed that the changes were permanent and broad, reaching beyond the context of the intervention (Raikou, 2013: 315-348).

However, regardless of the extent of differentiation in their perceptions, the intervention resulted in fresh concepts which the students themselves have processed, questioned and examined, leading to personal choices. The perceptions they now have concerning the role of the teacher, tend to help them shift from the state of the *object* where they were, to that of the *subject*. While initially the perception they had of their identity was formed by others and by seeing through the eyes of others, in the end the identity is self-constructed and they move to an internal dialogical relationship with themselves. This is in agreement to the basic principle of the constructive – developmental approach, according to which the most important achievement is the

evolution of the individuals' path towards the development of an internal power for making choices of external values, according to the self-determined system of beliefs (Kegan, 1994).

### Final remark

The combination of transformative learning and the constructive - developmental approach offers a fruitful ground for the promotion of a developmental course in the education of teachers through the use of critical thinking. Innovative methods can be very useful, such as “Transformative Learning through the Aesthetic Experience” which facilitates critical thinking on the assumptions of the learners, through art. The application of the specific method reinforces reflective processes and facilitates systematic small changes in opinions, which at a next level, transform cognitive habits. According to Mezirow (1990: 375), to become reflective, “*is central to cognition for survival in modern. It is the way we control our experiences rather than be controlled by them, and it is indispensable prerequisite to individual, group, and collective transformations, both perspective and social.*”

The development of critical thinking and the cognitive process of existing perceptions should be the corner stone of the education of teachers. It is necessary that the preparation of new educators should involve new methods and innovative practices, which will promote the development of reflective teachers, with broad horizons and the ability to adjust to constant changes. In order to achieve this, it is important for individuals to step back from social norms, to be capable to self – define and (re) identify themselves, leading eventually to their emancipation. To become *objects* of themselves.

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## **Transformative teachers' in-service training. An emancipatory lesson from the Cuban model**

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Adult education has always been a space where different social issues have been raised and systematically promoted. The “social purpose” tradition of adult education mainly seeks the transformation of society towards a more egalitarian direction (Martin, 1999).

Despite the fact that most scholars in adult education tradition don't support the project of an overall and radical social transformation through adult education, they all seem to agree that adult education programs contribute to the transformation of learners into active subjects (Torres & Freire, 1993). Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to explore the prerequisites for the formulation of transformative education programs and especially teachers' in-service training (inset) programs.

More specifically, the paper will focus on the Cuban case as a model of an adult education experience leading to social transformation. The Literacy Campaign carried out in Cuba constitutes a special event with local characteristics, mainly because of the historical and revolutionary nature of the general context. However, the Cuban model has a special value and may offer general ideas and practices which can inspire and inform adult education in general. The Campaign is presented as “a difficult conquest obtained through work, technique and organization” (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965, p. 72).

The paper utilizes the empowerment/emancipation distinction to make its theoretical points and to draw its practical conclusions. Empowerment is a term usually employed in the management discourse to connote the involvement of people in the development of their capacities, so as they can act successfully within the existing system of power. In contradistinction, emancipation means the critical process of analysis, resistance and challenging of the existing structures of power (Inglis, 1997). More analytically, empowerment is a process that takes place within the existing hierarchical divisions of power and, by and large, constitutes part of a broader strategic discourse that seeks to legitimate changes (i.e. the increase of productivity and/or profit) which are usually “above and beyond the interests of employees” (McCabe, 1996, p. 36). The process of empowerment is a more subtle development within a series of apparatuses aiming at the production of greater discipline, creation of obligations and mostly developing good practices of productive job. That is, while the term of emancipation entails resistance and transgression, empowerment means surrender and compliance to power (Inglis, 1997).

It follows that emancipation involves not only learning but also self-awareness and conceives the student as the agent of social change. In turn this means that educators must enable students to recognize and challenge the structures, the hierarchical system, the privileges, the rhetoric, the rules and the regulations of the educational system in which they operate. Adult educators have the obligation to help students to realize and understand power structures and the way power operates on and within their lives. Therefore, adult education for emancipation is first of all a collective educational process with the goal of social and political transformation (Inglis, 1997).

### **Description of the Cuban model**

The first section of the paper will shortly describe the main points of the National Literacy Campaign of 1961 in Cuba. It must be pointed out that all these features

cannot be understood without taking into consideration the socio-cultural aims of the country. Its main targets were the identification of the illiterate population, the recruitment and the training of the literacy workers and the implementation of the campaign. The present paper focuses on the training of the literacy workers and the implementation of the campaign mainly because it is concerned with the ways the Cuban model may inform teachers' inset programs.

It is important to note that during the years that followed the 1959 revolution the streets in Cuba were full with banners proclaiming education as a primary theme of the revolution. In few years the numbers of the illiterate dropped from 26,3% to 3,9% (Blaine, 2006). The success of the campaign is corroborated by the fact that Cuba has managed to maintain its high literacy rate. For example, in 2004 the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that the island's literacy rate was 97% (ibid).

However, education was not simply about literacy. From the very beginning the attack on illiteracy was viewed not simply as a technical or pedagogical problem, but as a profoundly political effort, closely tied to the revolutionary transformation of society (Fagen, 1969, p. 35). The goal of the program was clearly the emancipation of the rural population of the country. The program was based on the assumption that adult learners could not be perceived as empty vessels to be filled by the powerful society, but as active learners in themselves (Freire, 1972).

The 1961 campaign that sought to educate 700,000 Cubans consisted in three steps: The first step was the identification of the illiterate population and comprised the gathering of statistical data and practical information regarding residence, occupation, record of schooling and so on (Leiner, 1987).

The second step was the recruitment and training of literacy workers. The campaign had developed a program of training of two different types of adult educators: 35,000 professional teachers got involved in the training of 230,000 alfabetizadores (plain citizens determined to devote their free hours to teaching) and 100,000 student brigadistas (volunteer brigades of school-age youngsters). The training of the alfabetizadores involved: a) teacher training courses with instructions on methodology and b) manuals like "Venceremos" and "Alfabetizamos" (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965).

Alfabetizadores were motivated by their political, social and economic concerns and therefore the basis of their training was the exploration of the experiences of the adult illiterate students. They thought that it was important for the educator to learn about the experience and knowledge of their students which in turn would give them the opportunity to clarify concepts and practices relevant to the educational process on the basis of this very experience (Leiner, 1987).

The brigadistas who participated in the campaign going all around the country to teach reading and writing learned the first political lesson of their lives as literacy teachers. Moreover they at the same time learned from them that being rooted in the people as a whole is the crucial factor for the creation and advancement of the revolution (Hart, 2004). The main motive for their participation was mostly emotional since the campaign stressed the fact that the revolution and the peasant families needed them. The idea that excited the brigadistas was that they would form part of a team contributing to "a brave, bold and patriotic project" (Leiner, 1987, p. 177). Moreover, they believed that their participation was a perfect chance to engage in the ongoing process of revolution.

Finally, there were also a significant number of workers in all areas, as well as administrative and service personnel, whose efforts were indispensable to assuring the material and organizational success of the campaign (Hart, 2004).

### **The organization and implementation of the campaign: Description of the training of the adult students in Cuba**

In this section we will mainly focus on the organization of the adult training, a process mainly based on ways of learning in a conscious and orderly manner. In this process, both the illiterate adult and the adult educator were perceived as the active subjects of learning (Morales, 1981).

It must be pointed out that the literacy campaign was an act of major educational and cultural importance that forged revolutionary consciousness in new generations. It was part of the intense popular movement, with deep aspirations for the radical renovation of the structures in the country. Ignorance and exploitation were seen as the two sides of the same coin and the literacy campaign came to crash both down (Hart, 2004).

Key to this process was the idea that adult learning should have an emancipatory aim in the sense that the goal was to free learners from the forces that limit their options and control over their lives and to move them to take action to bring about social and political change (Cranton, 1994; Inglis, 1997).

The alphabetizadores in Cuba did not confine their practice to the reduction of illiteracy levels, but they were working in socially responsible and relevant ways to actively promote continuous societal change by furthering the ideals of participatory democracy defined as full citizen participation, freedom, equality and social justice (Cunningham, 1996, p. 1).

The major assumptions underlying the practices that foster emancipatory learning are: the teacher as learner, joint knowledge construction, critical reflection, student voice, and dialogue (Durie, 1996; Ellsworth, 1989; Hart, 1990; Tisdell, 1998). Emancipatory learning includes not only understanding existing power structures but also ways of resistance and challenging these structures and their underlying ideologies (Inglis, 1997). Transformative learning with its emphasis upon critical reflection is neither necessarily nor sufficiently emancipatory. What is important is that individual transformation must lead to some kind of collective transformative action. After all, the aim of the campaign was clearly the emancipation of the rural population. For it needs not to be forgotten that Cuban adult learners were at the same time field workers who were struggling to earn their collective lives and ensure national independence. As Blaine (2006, p. 1) puts it: “There aren't hordes of people wanting to become literate. What they want is to change their lives”.

The campaign was based on four essential principles which are: teamwork, emulation, improvement and testing. Each team was formed by six to ten students and each of them had a determined responsibility. Emulation was both individual and collective in the sense that it was given place to fraternal competition between teams of the same classroom, between schools, municipalities, etc. Improvement had the sense of the individual betterment and collective promotion. Both educators and trainers had the opportunity to obtain professional qualification and a high cultural level (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965. p. 63).

The main characteristics of the campaign used in the Cuban model are the following:

- a) The leading idea was that educational processes are revolutionary and emancipatory. Characteristic are the words of Fidel Castro and Che Guevara that: “Revolution and education are the same thing...society as a whole must become a huge school” (Gerassi, 1968, p. 391). In Ferrer's (1980) formulation: “The National Literacy Campaign had opened the way to participation of the masses in education. It established a direct dialogue which never existed before between the different social strata in the population...participation

became the crux of the pedagogy” (as cited in Leiner, 1987, p. 189). People’s participation and the consciousness of the socio-economic realities were the basic postulates of the campaign (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965, p. 72). Moreover, the campaign had as one of its aims to break down the psychological barriers to participation of adults in efforts of their own education (Dominguez, 1978, p. 165) and to inspire mobilization, organization and commitment of the learners (Leiner, 1987). The idea that ruled the campaign was that the country as “one large school” promoted a national political will for lifelong education.

- b) The campaign was characterized by “intensive organization and planning of the work” (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965, p. 48). More specifically, one of the principle characteristics of the campaign was the horizontal organization through the work of the alfabetizadores (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965, p. 72).
- c) The adult educators not only devoted themselves to the teaching of reading and writing, but also established close social and political ties with their adult students (Leiner, 1987).
- d) The guidelines were based on the methods of adult education, and at the same time the alfabetizadores were endowed with lively revolutionary spirit. The adult educator was urged to take into account the life and surroundings of the adult students, to base the educational process on the practical problems of life and on the events taking place in the nation, to pay particular attention to the relation between the subjects and to set a flexible schedule (Leiner, 1987).
- e) The political function of the relevant committees which supported the campaign was indirect and manifests itself in a whole series of human relations (Leiner, 1987). The secret of the success of the Campaign lies on a simple fact: “one that is very old and foreign to all technical means: human relationships. It must be found in those intellectual, sentimental and psychological chain reactions, which arise when relations are established between one human being and another” (Lorenzetto & Neys, 1965, p. 73).

Given the undoubted success of the campaign the question is whether they can inform other adult educational activities such as teachers’ inset.

### **Description of how the Cuban model could inform teachers’ inset.**

Having defined the core concept of the Cuban experience - collective learning - the paper seeks to point out that a) adult education cannot be reduced to competent teaching but also requires b) involvement in and dedication to the construction of collective subjects and the quest for social justice as both the means and the ends of an emancipator educational practice that seeks to restore the collective dignity of the people.

In its last section, the paper will argue that the Cuban example could inform processes and methods of transformative teachers’ in-service training programs. It will be suggested that it is impossible to achieve social transformation through adult education programs that focus on the pursuit of individualistic educational goals. On the contrary, adult education can be linked to transformative ideas and practices only to the extent that they are based on the creation of collective and active learning subjects with an emancipatory intent.

The most important element of the Cuban model is the emphasis on structured collective activities. It must be pointed out that emancipatory learning is a collective activity (Foley, 1998; Inglis, 1997) mainly because of its emphasis on social change. Through a process of critical reflection and analysis, individuals act collectively to address inequalities and injustices (Foley, 1998). Nevertheless, this doesn’t mean that



emancipatory learning cannot take place as an individual activity, as there is evidence that individuals can and do engage in emancipatory learning (Loughlin, 1994).

The Cuban paradigm informs us that the educational process must be based on the promotion of the desire to learn and to act. This idea provided the adult learner “with a way of learning in a conscious and orderly manner. It is based on the characteristics of the literacy worker and the illiterate as the subject of learning” (Morales, 1981, pp. 35-36). This aspect is very crucial and shows that the Cuban model was based on the collective construction of the meaning of education and the participation of the adult educator and the adult student as the subjects of the educational process. This transformation of persons from objects of learning to subjects of learning lies at the heart of the emancipatory education, as it helps persons construct their collective meaning and purpose of their education. The collective meaning stems from the motivation that their efforts would lead to a better life. This is exactly the part of the campaign that gave it its political character (Leiner, 1987).

Our conclusion based on the Cuban paradigm and its focus on collective qualification challenges the dominant inset model which is based on individual empowerment and competence and which in turn originates from managerialism and neoliberal ideology (Milana, 2012 as cited in Barros, 2012, p. 125).

Let's see an example from the Greek context that would help us appreciate the stakes of the debate.

According to the recent Presidential Decree 152/2013 (paragraph 3.3), concerning primary and secondary teachers' evaluation, there is a provision for teachers' inset to the extent they “fail” the hierarchically organized teachers' evaluation process. After a teacher has been evaluated by the headteacher and the school advisor and found “inadequate” in one of the evaluation criteria s/he is recommended to follow an inset individualized programme organized by the school advisor to improve his/her competencies to the relevant criterion. This contradicts the rationale of emancipatory education because emancipatory education can't be implemented in frameworks which emphasize “hierarchy, individualism and competition” (Zacharakis-Jutz, 1988, p. 45), as is the case with all educational systems the Greek included. The current Greek educational policy has given emphasis on “human resources” development whose ideological basis is neo-liberal (Milana, 2012 as cited in Barros, 2012, p. 125). The policies around teachers' inset put the emphasis on the concept of competencies which is related to the individual effort and reduces the collective effort for a common aim that the Cuban model teaches.

The example from the Greek educational scene is based on the model of competence which is strictly associated with individual empowerment. It is about a shift in the training of teachers and in adult education in general, which is the product of a certain policy direction. It's about a loss “related to social matters such as inequalities, power relations and political struggle for a better world” (Barros, 2012, p. 120).

The shift from the notion of collective qualification to that of individual competency must be seen as strictly linked to the social transition from the perspective of lifelong education to that of lifelong learning.

In the background of this transition there is the economy and a new type of politics that characterizes our recent history. This new type of politics is reined on the one hand by a break with the collective cultural values of the construction of the sense of belonging and social identity and on the other by a transformation of the social structures that shape the socialization of individuals resulting on a severe individualization (Barros, 2012, p.124).

Reflecting upon the success of the Cuban paradigm, it is our firm conviction that its principles – a) active participation of the teachers, on the basis of their students' needs and experiences, b) by means of horizontally organized networks of teachers and students that c) seek to forge social and political bonds so as d) to develop a transformative learning spirit that e) focuses on authentic and emancipatory human relations – can inform our educational activities; for, eventually education is primarily about an inter-subjective mutual recognition to the construction of a common expectation for a better world.

What happened in the Cuban paradigm is emancipatory education and we have to learn from it while designing inset programs for teachers. The role for the adult education must be quite clear. It is not necessary for the adult educator to be a political activist. Nevertheless, s/he must function as a facilitator for the adults students to help them progress from individual transformative learning to collective emancipatory education. Adult education has a crucial role to play in the sense that we have to show the direction of rejecting power. "Power and its colonizing effects on the lifeworld can be overcome; that it is possible to reach a just, free and equal society through rational communication" (Inglis, 1997, p. 15).

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**REFLECTION / REFLEXIVITY**



## **Building Partnership with Parents in Child Home Care**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to verify through the critical reflection of home care social pedagogues if it's possible to build partnerships with the parents of vulnerable children in the area of child home care and if Transformative Learning can play a role in this process.

### **The change in Child and Family Welfare**

A large number of significant elements tells us that the Child and Family Welfare (CFW), the set of social care services for vulnerable children, adolescents and families, has been changing, by reason of a decline in resources (Pinkerton, 2011) and promising innovative practices (Grietens, 2010). Looking carefully at the European CFW scenario, a series of recurring and common “directions” are emerging as the ripe fruit of 20 years of exchanges, thanks to the influence of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989) and to the European Union integration policies (Premoli, 2012).

Among the emerging new directions in CFW, the Family Preservation and Family Bonds Protection Approach stands out. This approach is directed to consider the family as a whole, without opposing children's and parents' rights, providing, where attainable, the greatest possible involvement of the parents in the care interventions (Pourtois & Desmet, 2002; Milani 2009b), without disregarding the fundamental best interest of the child.

Across the world the increasing focus of social work intervention is geared towards prevention of separation and giving support to families instead of taking children out of these families and placing them in alternative care, based on the rights of children to be raised by their parents.

To center the focus of the intervention on the family allows us to recognize that the family system is affected by the interdependence of its members. Through the strengthening and support of the entire family, it greatly increases the chance of making significant changes to all the members of the family (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988, p.6). Often only through strengthening the family it is possible to promote the child well-being (Milani, 2001). Supporting vulnerable families is a key way of protecting children: “it should therefore be obvious that this poses the problem of home care services in support of these families” (Milani, 2009b, p. 8).

The home-based care services for vulnerable children and their families over the years have experienced considerable transformations both: a) following the emergence of innovative approaches and evidence-based experiences and b) as a result of a significant downsizing of social policies and the reduction of the welfare allocations at national and regional levels.

Many authors have noted the need for a change of perspective in interventions leading social pedagogues and social workers, while respecting the role asymmetry, to share power with parents in defining the aims of the intervention and deciding how to proceed through a process of mutual cooperation (Bundy-Fazioli, Briar-Lawson & Hardiman, 2008). Furthermore, it is known that working with the birth parents, where

possible, ensures over time effectiveness of the intervention and long-term positive effects (Tingey, Boyd & Casto, 1987; Serbati & Milani, 2013).

From these considerations, it follows that the objective of this research is to verify several questions through the comparison and critical reflection of home care professionals: does it make sense to build partnerships with the parents of vulnerable children in the area of child home care? Is it possible to do it? Which expertise is required?

## **The Research Framework**

### *Epistemological References*

The epistemological foundations of this research are rooted in four key concepts: practice, reflectivity, transformative learning and community of inquiry.

The advent of constructivist and phenomenological interpretations about the processes of knowledge production allowed the emergence of new epistemologies that legitimize the practice as “a context capable of generating situated knowledges, locally built” (Fabbri, 2007, p. 20). The production of knowledge in this sense is possible through the implementation of reflective settings in practice, conceived as a creative cultural activity in which there isn't separation between thought and action.

According to Fook (1999, p.11), reflectivity is “the process in which you are able to reflect upon the ways your own assumptions and actions influence a situation, and thus change your practice as a direct result of this reflective process. In this way of thinking, reflectivity becomes a type of research method, one which allows a practitioner to research her or his own practice (or that of others) in order to change or improve it”.

Together with reflectivity, the concept of Transformative Learning (Mezirow, 1991) is becoming increasingly important, with its main focus in the search for justification of why a learning happens. This assumption, if transferred within the communicative dynamics of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), reveals the fruitfulness of the invitation to argue in detail what is actually done in daily practice, as a condition for the transformation of the practice itself.

Finally, the idea of community of inquiry, introduced by Peirce and Dewey, seems convincing: a group of people who share a research process designed to build knowledge through confrontation, dialogue and argument. This concept refers to a representation of scientific knowledge as a socio-cultural construct based on participation and sharing. It integrates perfectly with Dewey's vision that provides to the scientific inquiry the characters of contextuality, connection to the experience and the processes of meaning attribution through the language (Dewey, 2001).

Hence,

inquiry, as Dewey conceived it, is transactional, open-ended, and inherently social. He thought that inquiry proceeds, as Peirce had said earlier, from doubt to the resolution of doubt. But as Dewey would have it, “*We* are doubtful because the *situation* is inherently doubtful. Inquiry begins, Dewey believed, with an indeterminate (i.e., confusing, obscure, or conflictual) situation and goes on to make that situation determinate. The inquirer does not stand outside the problematic situation like a spectator, he is *in* it and *in transaction with* it. (Schön, 1992, p.122)

Therefore, it seems clear that the epistemological orientation of this work pertains to the research centered on the practice, which aims “to create a reflective relationship



between practices in different contexts and the prevailing conceptions and theories in the social sciences” (Julkunen, 2011, p. 61). The heart of the practice research, as Shaw (2005) states, “is characterised by its orientation to change, that is to say that the function of research is to find different ways and solutions for developing practices” (Julkunen, 2011, p.62).

### *Context*

“La Grande Casa” is a non profit and non governmental organization and since 1989 it has been working with vulnerable children, teens and families in the Milanese area, where it develops residential services and daily care interventions. Among the former we find children and teen homes, foster care, support for young people leaving care, shelters for maltreated women and refugees social housing; among the latter are: family preservation services by home care and child daycare centres; school education support; family resource centres; young people centres; foster care support networks; disabled children support.

In particular, the Social Cooperative “La Grande Casa” manages child home care services on behalf of 6 local authorities, committing a total of about 50 social pedagogues.

### *Methodology*

This is a practiced-based research which, by using a narrative inquiry and research-formation approach (*recherche-formation*, Josso, 1995), aims to create a reflective relationship between the professional practices of a group of the social co-operative “La Grande Casa” home care workers and social care theories. This is to develop a practice-based and shared knowledge, and to produce change in the home care services provided by these workers.

The research is based on the model of practice research developed by Julkunen (2011, p.62-63), “ideally pictured as an iterative process of reflection, critical examination and collective engagement” (Figure 1 below), based on the following steps:

- Formulation of problems and issues to be investigated in the practical context: a focus group, managed by the facilitators with a “brainstorming” methodology, highlights a number of questions to guide the research.
- Construction of the context. Within La Grande Casa’s three-years planning of social workers training, a Practice Research Workshop, aimed at exploring new ways of working with birth parents in child home care, was planned. The Workshop is a peer and transformative learning context for the construction of shared knowledge, through a reflective methodology, inspired by the communities of inquiry and practices;
- Promotion of reflective dialogue. Over the course of two months four working days were spent on activities of discussion and experiential sharing, based on narrative, argument and reflective methodologies.
- Identification of concepts, values and patterns. The participants analyzed all the produced data and materials. On these basis the facilitators developed a first research report.
- Validation of the knowledge. The group analyzed the research report two months later to assess the adequacy and the consonance with the path. Signs and additions were collected.

- Return to the practical context. The first outputs of the research were the introduction of changes in the child home care planning and management processes and in the training of social pedagogues.

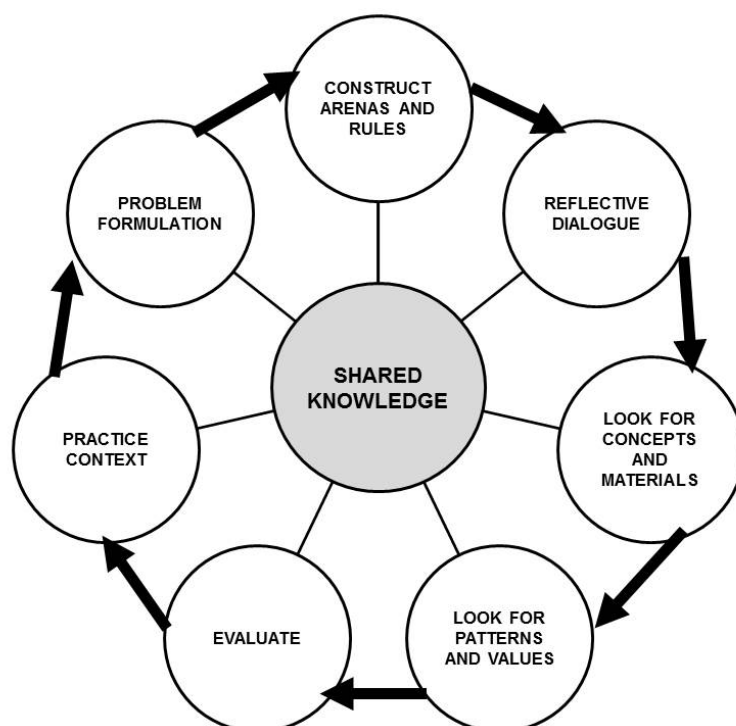


Figure 1: the Model of Practice Research (Julkunen, 2011, p.63).

### *Participants*

The community of inquiry is composed by the author, a colleague named Diego Mairani, who both serve the function of facilitators/trainers, and ten social pedagogues of child home care services, managed by the Social Cooperative “La Grande Casa”, chosen for experience and competences, recognized by colleagues. The ages of participants are between 28 and 38 years and all of them are female. Three of them are mothers. All participants are effective members of the Cooperative and have developed a high level of belonging to the organization.

### **Social Workers and Vulnerable Parents in a mirror**

Consolidating actions aimed at protecting the family bonds as an alternative to actions aimed at protecting children, separating them from their birth families, requires a change in perspective which brings about the need for the social worker to share responsibility and decision-making process with parents.

Reflectivity (Fook, 1999) and Transformative Learning (Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 1997), as in a mirror, are the core elements of the change required to the social workers by the radical transformations of Child and Family Welfare. At the same time, they are the core elements that may allow vulnerable parents to recover sufficient parenting skills, preventing alternative care placements for their children.

It is evident that specific attention must emerge in adults (parents in particular) who take care of children and adolescents, which aims to teach thinking for themselves: they are women and men, involved in events that have a strong relational and

existential meaning, and they can benefit from adequate training and learning to get them out of problems and critical situations (Demetrio, 2003) or avoid dangerous behaviors for their children (Barth, 2009).

The intervention in favor of these vulnerable families should be absolutely re-thought in light of the concept of adulthood that manifested itself in the last decades (Demetrio & Alberici, 2002). The traditional representation of adult is rigid, stable, correlated with patterns defined by the social expectations, while the emergence of the concept of adulthood states the irreducible complexity of adult experience and makes this existential condition and this social role feasible in terms of fluidity, mobility, change (Demetrio, 2003). It is a new conception of individual development as a process with dynamism and plasticity, marked by continuous transformations, along the entire lifespan.

In this sense, “the parenthood, understood as a function of the adult (...) can be learned and supported” (Milani, 2009: 18). And this statement also applies to those vulnerable adults who measure their own “(in)competence” in being parents (Formenti, 2008a). If these parents are given the opportunity to “take a reflective contact with the world”, for example, by exchanging views with a home care social pedagogue, making use of a family therapy, participating in a mutual help group for vulnerable parents, “something new happens and this is education” (Demetrio, 2003). Supporting vulnerable parents on the basis of the adult education milestones means:

- to place the subject in the focus of attention with its developmental needs and its growth and transformation possibilities throughout the course of life (Demetrio & Alberici, 2002);
- to enhance the biographicity, meaning the ability to autonomously build a life plan and pursue it in a creative and flexible way (Alheit & Dausien, 2000);
- to promote reflective thinking to facilitate the acquisition of new forms of being parents;
- to understand the specific family system and context to get the situational parenting skills and competencies that the parent has developed in his practice and to support and enhance the “existing positive” (see Fabbri, 2007).

### **A new representation of parents: moms and dads a little bit like this and a little bit like that**

The help and support to vulnerable families should not be problem-oriented but rather strengths-oriented – in and around the family system (Walsh, 2006). The reality, stories, features, problems and resources of each family must be heard, understood, assessed, enhanced and require a non-standard but personalized approach (Milani, 2009a).

Several studies highlight that parental involvement is an essential element in obtaining effective interventions in favor of vulnerable children (Dawson & Berry, 2002; Littell, 2001; Berry, 1992).

In order to really pursue the best interest of the child it is necessary to work with his/her birth family. The right to have good enough parents is not impossible to fulfil, but someone has to take care of these (in)competent parents to enable them in caring for their children, according to their possibilities. It is obvious that in order to work

effectively with parents it is necessary to redefine the way of conceiving parents by the social pedagogues and social workers.

The “trade” of mother and father can only be learned by the actual everyday life of being a parent: this is a practical and contextual skill, situated in family, social and cultural relationship systems.

Speaking about (in)competent parents makes conceivable a change in direction of the competences development. For example, there are ways to replace dysfunctional labels shaping deterministic views of the vulnerable parents and families, when they are called “multi-problem families” or “inadequate parents”. Prandin & Papetti (2006) suggest to call them “disheveled” families or to conceive them as “moms and dads a little bit like this and a little bit like that”. “Non-judging” ways of conceiving families and parents constitute the conditions of possibility for a transformative action.

In fact, there are “ways of being or not being parents, that is easy to criticize, condemn, evaluate negatively, before having really understood them. Reading [...] stories of moms and dads a bit special, a little bit normal, almost borderline, means trying to understand – but lightly and with a tender and non-judgmental look – hurtful behaviors, even without intention, attitudes that confuse, while they would like to convey love and presence” (Formenti, 2006, *afterword*). Being able to understand these people and these bonds, without condemning or labelling “with precise definitions – He/she is an incompetent...! He/she is crazy...! He/she is bad...! He/she is problematic...! – is a proper, important and potentially therapeutic act. It is a profoundly ethical act” (Formenti, 2006).

According to Paola Milani (2009b, pp. 26-27), “the concept of parenting is a semantic construct that refers to practical skills that parents possess to guide, protect, educate and provide balanced growth for their children”; but the question is “Are the parents required for a minimum level of attention and care? And what is this minimum?”. This is not a speculative question, but a question that intercepts basic issues in the story of a child and a family, because they have to do with invasive and often compulsory interventions.

The definition of the right intervention for a family emerges from the relationship between professionals and vulnerable parents (Milani, 2009a; Milani, 2009b; Serbati & Milani, 2011). In this sense, it seems unavoidable to turn the matter of parenting recoverability around (can he/she be helped and recovered?), considering alternatively, if the skills of the professionals involved are adequate to enable and support a transformative process that would permit the parenting recovery. Obviously, such a transformation of meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991) could cause discomfort to the social pedagogue and social worker on the epistemic code (is he/she able to develop a level of reflectivity adequate to wonder about his/her professional practices and, therefore, change them?), on the sociocultural code (is he/she capable of enough decentralization to get out of a rigidly-defined professional model, in order to gain a new perspective?) and, above all, on the psychological code (does this new idea of assessment, that calls into question the professional competence, undermine the professional self-esteem?).

### **Competences for building partnership**

According to several important studies (Fook, 2000; Camilleri, 1999; Green, Gregory & Mason, 2006), a representation of the effectiveness of the social pedagogue/user relationship based on the idea of partnership building emerges from the reflections of the practitioners.

Building a partnership is connected to several professional competences as follows, to which we must add a further competence, as discussed just above: thinking of the parent as an adult who can change (and react as a consequence).

*Put oneself in the shoes of the parents*

Through a specific research-training activity, aimed at the assumption of the home care users (parents) perspective, it emerged that the social pedagogues know how to get fears, refusals, expectations, needs, desires and feelings of parents with whom they work. These parents need to be acknowledged, listened to, accepted, reassured and enhanced in their strengths.

When I accept the home care intervention, I would like to be known and heard. I would like to feel understood in a gentle and sincere way. I don't need specialist recommendations, but proximity, confidence and help in managing the relationship with the social service.

It is essential for a social pedagogue to be able to assume an attitude of empathy, respect, authenticity (Wasik, 1993), decentralization and taking the point of view of the other (Bertolini & Caronia, 1993). In fact, we believe that the ability to assume (hypothetically) the perspective of another person on our behalf (Mezirow, 1991) and to put ourselves in the shoes of another, allows a social pedagogue to "sharpen the gaze" (Fabbri, 2008, p. 51).

*Rethink professional distance*

The proximity built with the parents, who I have supported over a number of years, can be both positive as it offers opportunities for action, and negative because of over-involvement risk. So I wonder what is the most suitable position in the relationship. I prefer to consider the proximity as a resource. In addition, taking the perspective of the parent, I would rather choose a social pedagogue that I trust.

The social pedagogue freely chooses the level of involvement according to the situation and his/her expertise. According to Green, Gregory & Mason (2006, p.450) "professional distance and professional boundaries can be flexible and elastic, while still ensuring competent and appropriate practice. It may be useful to picture boundaries as a 'stretchy piece of elastic' or a continuum between the 'professional, objective expert' and the 'helpful friend' rather than the dichotomy of professional and nonprofessional that is often presented".

Several studies show that the presence of trust between social workers and families seems to be an important mediator for change and a key factor in the success of interventions (Dore & Alexander, 1996).

*Assess properly, relativizing our own perspective on the families*

Everyone develops personal representations with respect to what a family is, based on his/her own experience and sensitivity. The imperative for good support is to dismantle the perceptions of the ideal family and parenthood in order to see the real parents.

### *Supported parenting*

Supporting parenting skills is not intended to bring out or to convey what parents do not know how to do, or what mistakes they make, but to propose different points of view, that can stimulate reflectivity and Transformative Learning (Schön 1983; Mezirow, 1991).

Parents need to benefit from the social pedagogue's support in everyday life to learn (experientially):

- to understand the point of view and the needs of their child, decentralizing themselves and empathizing with their child;
- to manage issues related to the education of children, which can both reduce the tensions in the family and increase their self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy.

Every Friday night. Maya, an 8 year old girl, has to get ready to go to sleep at her dad's home. When she comes home from school no one tells her what time to be ready for her dad's arrival ... chaos explodes... "Do I take a shower or not?". "What do I wear, what do I put in the luggage?". Her mother only spoke to scold her.

I suggested to her mother and grandmother that they would schedule her tasks, in a calm and clear way. The child is very exuberant and independent. She has too many references that act in different ways: better to have a single voice, clear and precise. The grandmother imposed the shower at the last minute without motivating the child. During the meetings, I was encouraging mum to tell the child what to do, accompanying and giving accurate information. Now the mother is able to mark the times and the child asks calmly what to do.

### *Share decision making*

From the beginning it is necessary to have a clear communication and negotiation approach which underlines the idea of joint action, so it is possible to plan the intervention together. In fact, users – parents or children – have the right to participate actively in decision-making about all matters affecting their lives.

## **Conclusions**

The fact that building partnerships between professionals and users has the potential to facilitate the development of effective interventions as well as enhance and recover parenting skills, has implications for both public policy and practice.

Policy makers have yet to fully recognize the value and the importance of involving users in a partnership with professionals, empowering them. Child and Family Welfare needs politics that are more oriented to birth family involvement and participation, in order to increase the effectiveness of interventions and to decrease the medium-term costs to the welfare system.

According to Milani (2001, p. 46), parents can then "be considered active partners in a shared process, where there is the possibility to build negotiated purposes, mutual support and complementary roles", activating the resources available within the family and in its ecosystem. This evidence requires transformative learning to be implemented.

Mezirow (1997, p.10) states that "Transformative Learning is not an add-on. It is the essence of adult education". Therefore, parents' involvement in the direction of a partnership in a joint support intervention is possible only if someone helps parents

become aware and critical of their own and others' assumptions, and transform their frame of reference to understand the experience of parenting.

Equally social pedagogues can support parents' transformative learning only on condition that they themselves learn to radically change their frame of reference, habits of mind and points of view concerning family support.

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## Underneath the Ideals: The Prerequisites and Challenges of Reflection

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### Abstract

Regarding reflection in education, the ideals are clearly articulated while the process and actualities of reflection are less understood. Consequently, this paper articulates the prerequisite capacities involved, and the recurring challenges encountered, in reflective practices. The theoretical roots lie in the writings of Mezirow and Damasio.

### Introduction

Within recent decades, promoting reflection, for varying purposes, has become one of the trends of higher and adult education. Despite the volume of promotion, there is far less understanding concerning what reflection actually requires: what is the *process* of reflection, and what kind of challenges and obstacles one may face while practicing reflection? Indeed, for an educator to be able to consider, in an ethically sound manner, whether to promote reflection in one's educational program, it is important to have a more thorough understanding of the process that reflection entails, the actualities of it, and not only what reflection at its best may offer.

This paper focuses on what makes reflection difficult to carry out in practice and what prevents us from taking advantage of the assumed benefits of reflection. We hold that critical inquiry regarding the presuppositions of theories of reflection will generate new perspectives. Hopefully, this will refresh the discussion of some major theoretical concepts that are in danger of reification (see e.g. Brookfield, 1992; Jordi, 2011; Newman 2012; Ruitenberg, 2010; Whetten, 1989). Furthermore, such an inquiry might offer tools to reconsider the role and responsibilities of promoting reflection in educational settings.

More specifically, we will present a conceptualization developed in an earlier doctoral thesis of the first author (Mälkki 2011; 2010) that considers the prerequisites and challenges of reflection. Specifically the developed concepts of comfort zone and edge-emotions suggest, that the challenges of reflection are fundamentally a matter of how emotions, that basically function in favor of survival, affect our sophisticated cognitive functions. Along with the deepened understanding of the challenges of reflection, new ways of actualizing reflection are brought in view. The bases for this conceptualization lie on a critical analysis of both Mezirow's (e.g., 1981; 1991; 2000; 2009) transformative learning theory and Damasio's (e.g., 1999; 2010) neurobiological theory on consciousness and emotions, as well as empirical analyses within both educational setting (Mälkki & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2012) and when undergoing a real-life crisis (Mälkki, 2012).

### The case of reflection within the field of higher and adult education

While the focus of this paper will be in reflection based on Mezirow's (e.g., 1981; 1991; 2000) conceptualization, the motivation for reflecting on Mezirow's view arises from the wider stance regarding reflection in the field of adult and higher education. Namely, while the notion of reflection has been widely used as an educational concept across wide variety of educational programs and courses on adult and higher

education, the case for reflection is far from being closed. Rather, underneath the tempting and promising image of the concept, there exist various pedagogical, theoretical, methodological problems that are far less often discussed than the concept is being applied.

Reflection is often seen as an educational tool that is assumed to bring in its wake rather profound results: transformation, empowerment, development of scholarship of teaching, expertise, leadership skills, higher order thinking skills, to name a few, are often mentioned as the benefits of reflection (e.g. Bleakley, 1999; Boud & Walker, 1998; Brookfield 2006; Fisher, 2003; Kreber, 2005; McAlpine et al, 1999; Schön, 1983). Such anticipated results are often used to justify promoting reflection in pedagogical practices. However, there are various critical voices presented, suggesting that the whole idea of reflection is rather a pedagogical mantra devoid of content (Ecclestone, 1996; Procee, 2006). Furthermore, many claim that what the practices of reflection bring about is only superficial pondering (e.g. Bleakley, 1999; Brookfield, 1994; Ecclestone, 1996; Kreber, 2004; Taylor, 2007). This criticism may indicate that (the profound results of) *reflection exist only in theory*. Taken the other way around, it may be seen that the theories and models that are used as basis for these applications, only focus on the ideals while lacking conceptualized understanding concerning the process of reflection and the challenges of it. This neglects the viewpoint noted by Illeris (2007), that the theories of learning should not only talk of the ideals but also why the intended learning does not occur (see also Malinen, 2000). From this perspective, the problems in the pedagogical sphere seem to be a result of the limited scope of the theories of reflection, in offering understanding of the actualities of reflection.

In fact, there is empirical research suggesting that to understand reflection, there are emotional and social aspects to it that are relevant besides the cognitive aspects depicted in the theories and models (see e.g. Taylor, 1997; 2000; 2007; 2008). However, while these studies themselves lean on those cognitively focused theories that the studies to some extent show to be limited, this discrepancy between the theory and empirical findings has not been utilized in developing the theories further (Mälkki, 2011). In that sense it appears that the social and emotional aspects of reflection have, hitherto, *existed only in practice, not in theory*.

The issue of theoretical debate and elaborations being scarce may not only be a problem of the case of reflection, but may represent the state of educational research more generally (see Mälkki, 2011; Illeris, 2007; Peltonen, 2009). When the theoretical bases are left unexamined, this runs the risk of stagnation of knowledge, reification of concepts and leaning on givens or superficial interpretations of the theories, with regards to empirical research and practical applications... which hardly is what the current accentuation on research-based teaching aims at.

Theoretical interest has not been totally absent, however. There are scholars who have presented their own definitions of reflection as well as categorizations concerning the levels, contents or types of reflection (e.g., Kreber & Castleden, 2009; McAlpine & Weston, 2000; McAlpine *et al.*, 1999; Moon, 2004). From a methodological perspective, they, however, often fail to situate their contributions to previous theorizations and philosophical bases. In consequence, the new definitions of reflection tend to aggregate as overlapping conceptualizations while not explicating how they relate to each other, nor how they contribute to earlier research (see also Bleakley, 1999; Mezirow, 2007). While these definitions reveal the varying ways in which reflection may manifest itself, they do not, as such offer information why the results often don't match the expectations. When these difficulties are acknowledged

there is little attention paid to the process of application that might reveal how they may be surpassed.

From these starting points, the study originated from the analysis of Mezirow's conceptualization of reflection. Mezirow's view offers one of the most sophisticated conceptualizations on reflection, within a broader frame of adult learning theory, and it is also widely empirically studied, thus offering suitable basis for the study.

### **Theorizing the challenges of reflection**

Our paper has a dual purpose that may appear paradoxical. On the one hand we wish to articulate the micro-processes of reflection that have been lacking in previous theorizing while on the other we wish those elaborations to display a coherency with what has already been developed by Mezirow. However, while it appeared that Mezirow had not specifically considered this issue in his theory, it is not to say that his theory would not have something useful considering it. In the following we will attempt to show what is implied but not stated in Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Thus we will attempt to carry forward or develop the theory in a way that would enable successful pedagogical practices.

The analysis of Mezirow's theory started with an orienting question: *why is reflection challenging, or in some way not easy to actualize*. More specifically, the methods of rational reconstruction (Davia, 1998; Peltonen, 2009; Hannus & Simola, 2010; Rorty, 1984) and conceptual analysis (see Holma, 2009; 2010; Kakkuri-Knuuttila, 2007; Ruitenbergh, 2010) were applied, in aiming to locate both the most fruitful elements of the theory as well as the limitations, with regard to that question. As a result of this analysis, two essential perceptions were discovered that could be used as basis for further analysis and conceptual development. The first one concerns the relations between two central concepts of Mezirow's theory, namely, meaning perspective and reflection. In essence, these concepts appeared to be in contradiction with each other: Mezirow's use of the concept of meaning perspective indicates that meaning perspectives, those socially formed meaning structures, basically offer us a coherent and continuous understanding of the present situation within the light of our previous understandings and experiences (e.g., Mezirow, 1991; 2000). This filtering role of meaning perspective provides us the continuity between past and present and future expectations. This is needed in order to form meaningful interpretations of the current situation, and to be able to make meaning of our experience in general (see e.g. Mezirow, 2000, p.3).

Meaning perspective thus provides us with the tools that we need to be able to make sense of our experience, and form coherent understanding of what happens within us and in the environment. In contrast, reflection appears as a process that is characterized by very oppositional ambitions (see Mälkki 2010; 2011). Namely, reflection aims at becoming aware and questioning those self-evident assumptions that we use in governing our thinking, feeling and actions (see e.g. Mezirow 1981; 1991; 2000; 2009). That is, while the automatic filtering provided by meaning perspective provides us the very tools to make sense of our experience, reflection aims to interrupt this very tendency. It aims to bring into view that which is taken for granted in this orienting function of meaning perspective. In fact, it seems that the orienting function consists of assumptions that are taken for granted. Thus, meaning perspective is not a mere passive compilation of assumptions awaiting to be reflected on, but it is a frame of reference with a fundamental function in providing us the method for understanding in the first place. In consequence, there are two sets of

contradicting intentions taking place when meaning perspective and reflection are included within the same framework, both of which cannot unproblematically happen at the same time (see Mälkki 2010; 2011).

From the conceptual viewpoint this dilemma appears as a relevant perception regarding the question of the challenges to reflection. It indicates that already within Mezirow's theory there are – whether Mezirow intended it so or not – factors that imply that reflection is not necessarily easy to carry out.

Furthermore, often Mezirow's theory is criticized for neglecting the emotional and social aspects of transformative learning and reflection while being cognitively and rationally emphasized (see e.g. Clark & Wilson, 1991; Illeris, 2004; Jokikokko, 2009; Mezirow, 2009; Taylor, 2000; 2007). The analysis revealed that while the core argumentation of the theory concerns the cognitive and rational aspects of reflection and development of meaning perspectives, the emotional dimension is, however, implied in several instances. Most importantly from the viewpoint of challenges of reflection, it appeared that anxiety and threat of chaos appear in cases where meaning making is not possible. This suggests that the role of emotions may be significant in terms of the challenges of reflection.

Since the indications of emotions were not considered more deliberately in Mezirow's theory, the nature of emotions, their origins, dynamics and characteristics remain unclear. Therefore Damasio's (e.g., 1999; 2010) theory concerning understanding of emotions and consciousness was taken under closer examination. Based on neurological research, Damasio offers basic understanding of the nature and functions of emotions. According to Damasio (1999), the basic function of emotions is to ensure the reactions necessary for survival. That is, based on emotions we are automatically oriented to fight or flight, in case of danger, and to search for safety. More generally, we use our emotions as indicators concerning the suitability of the environment. If we feel uneasy in our surroundings, we become concerned of what is wrong. Thus, the emotion, with its negative or positive experiential tones, prepares us for requisite action and directs our cognitive functions accordingly (Damasio 1999; 2010).

Furthermore, Damasio (e.g., 1999; 2010) explains how emotions have a fundamental role also in terms of consciousness. Based on his brain research he shows how cognition and emotion are inseparable. In fact, without emotions, we would be able to carry out only the most logical tasks, the kind of which seldom faced in everyday life. Further, in his studies, the brain injured individuals that no longer experienced emotion were unable to make decisions in their best interest. Consciousness enhances our possibilities for survival, as well, due to being able to plan, consider, anticipate and review previous experience (Damasio, 1999).

While Damasio discusses the role of both emotions and consciousness in survival, he does not, however, consider the kind of threats that the structures of consciousness, i.e. meaning perspectives, may face (Mälkki, 2010). This viewpoint would, precisely, be important for considering the challenges and prerequisites of reflection. As argued above, reflection is not only a tool for “developing” the meaning perspectives, but, as well, a threat to those basic functions that meaning perspectives take care of.

Damasio, similarly to Mezirow appeared to offer some elements of understanding needed for grasping the dynamics of reflection. However, precisely concerning the question of the challenges and prerequisites of reflection, neither theorist adequately addresses them. This called for constructing new conceptualization on the basis of the elements offered by these theorists, to address those questions. While the theories of Mezirow and Damasio represent different fields of inquiry as well as theoretical and methodological positions, the most important issue, within the frame of this study, is

their potential in offering relevant explication concerning the phenomenon in question, i.e. the challenges of reflection (Mälkki, 2011; see also Trigg, 2001). Their views on the structures of consciousness, or meaning perspectives, appeared coherent, which supported the constructing of conceptualization, while requiring paying close attention in the analysis to their discrepant aspects as well (see Mälkki 2010; 2011).

Analyzing the elements of both Damasio's and Mezirow's theory together so as to reach understanding of the prerequisites and challenges to reflection, gave rise to the new concepts of *edge-emotions* and *comfort zone*. Namely, comfort zone, as we define it based on on the first author's research, refers to *the experience of comfort when nothing questions our meaning perspectives*. That is, when we are able to make meaning to our experiences within the light of our previous understanding. Thus the comfort zone may be seen as the experiential dimension of the meaning perspectives. In contrast, the edge-emotions refer to *those 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*.

Our emotions often operate as an alarm system albeit on two different levels. On the one hand, through their negative and positive tones emotions inform us of an existential threat or safety in general—an ontological matter. While on the other hand the emotional aspects of a disorienting dilemma inform us of threat or safety with regards to our meaning perspectives—an epistemological matter. Furthermore, the emotions not only offer us information but motivate us for reactions as well, so as to avoid danger (Damasio, 1999). Respectively, the edge-emotions, that arise at the edges of our comfort zones when our meaning perspectives become questioned, orient us to avoid the threat to our meaning perspectives. The reactions, in this case, refer to avoid dealing with the questioned assumptions, or aiming to reframe in a way that the problem can be explained away.

In this way, the same emotions that function in favour of survival, also appear to function in favour of keeping the meaning perspectives intact. On the positive side this supports maintaining the coherent and consistent understanding of ourselves and the world: it prevents us from ending up in a chaos where we are unable to make meaning to our experience. On the negative side it makes it more probable that when faced with a disorienting dilemma (a challenge to our assumptions) we would be tempted to rationalize that challenge in order to maintain our meaning perspective, and to remain in the comfort zone.

From this perspective, the disorienting dilemma, which is often seen as the trigger for transformative learning and reflection, is first and foremost an emotional matter and we end up out of our comfort zones, and experience edge-emotions. To turn these dilemmas into learning events, would, then, require us working with these edge-emotions.

In fact, rather naturally, 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 and unwanted. However, in order to utilize these edge-emotions in learning and reflection, requires us to modify our disposition and attitude towards them. Rather than judging and negating them, we would need to embrace them, be open to them, see them as natural and normal experiences in itself that need to be understood. In fact, the possibility of our coming to an understanding is greatly enhanced when we adopt a positive disposition toward these edge emotions. In the end, it is underneath those edge-emotions, where we can find those questioned assumptions that call for our attention (see Mälkki 2010; 2011; 2012a; 2012b; Mälkki & Green, 2014).

## Discussion

The conceptualization discussed briefly above suggests that there is a commonality and connection between our basic survival mechanisms and the ways in which the meaning perspectives function; both the physical being (the animal body) and the psychological being want to survive. With regard to this, it is suggested that the challenges of reflection is fundamentally a matter of how emotions, that basically function in favor of survival, influence our sophisticated cognitive functions. While these emotions by their nature brings us the tendency to avoid perceiving and dealing with the questioned assumptions at the focus of reflection, the possibilities for reaching these assumptions increase along with our tolerance and acceptance of the these unpleasant emotions. When we recoil from reflection because it brings uncertainty we miss the chance to become aware of the underlying premises and assumptions which are generating our experience and behavior. Regarding pedagogical practices, this conceptualization bears implications while raising some cautionary notes as well.

Within the discussion on transformative learning, disorienting dilemma is often seen as the trigger for reflection. That is, reflection is seen to be stimulated by our assumptions becoming questioned. In consequence, in order to promote reflection in educational practices, it is often seen necessary to aim to provoke the learners to the extent to create some kind of disorienting dilemma that would trigger reflection and transformative learning. In our view, however, this kind of approach that focuses only on the epistemological aspect of reflection not only raises several ethical questions but also, as such, requires further focus on handling the actual challenges in the process of reflection. The “tales from the dark side” brought up by Brookfield (1992) are without a doubt as valid as ever. In addition, the conceptualization presented in this paper explicates theoretically the way cognition and emotion are inseparably intertwined in the process of reflection. For the educator, this offers a more thorough understanding of what is being required of the students when the tempting ideals of reflection are pursued (see also Mälkki & Green, 2014).

As suggested in this paper, the core capacity for employing reflection productively is our disposition towards the edge emotions that have been activated. The way we have come to relate to these emotions is not only our private, individual psychological tendency. Rather it is reinforced by yet another socially shared assumption that we have come to incorporate into our meaning perspectives. While our tendency to negate these emotions is partly biologically functional, the other part may be seen to stem from the way we have, in our [western] culture, learned to conceive of ourselves as rational subjects. The emotional sphere, on the other hand is seen as subordinate and, as such, to be kept under control. What we have suggested in this paper, however, problematizes this assumption. Instead, we suggest that the way towards reflection - and increased rationality in thinking - is opened up along with the acceptance of the way those sophisticated cognitive functions interact with our biologically based functions of emotions. Thus, instead of *pathologizing* human emotions, we suggest the emotions need to be *normalized*, to be understood as a normal, essential part of human condition. In educational practices, this may be supported by presenting the theorization on the challenges of reflection to the students, while paying close attention to the class atmosphere and the role of the teacher (see Mälkki & Green, 2014).

Furthermore, the recent trend to foster reflection and other “therapeutic tools” in

educational programs have been given serious criticism (see e.g., Ecclestone & Hayes, 2009). Indeed, practices of reflection are not free from the risk of the tool becoming the master rather than the servant. When this occurs everything becomes a matter for reflection. Everything becomes a matter of doubt when the meaning perspective is undermined by wholesale reflection. Of course this undermines the learner's sense of self efficacy. In other words when reflection is being taken up to excess, the learner becomes soaked up into his or her own private problems. While keeping this in mind, we would like to emphasize the connection between social and individual already built into Mezirow's theory. Namely, Mezirow (e.g., 2009) considers meaning perspectives to be socially formed through culture and language. Consistent with this, Mezirow (1981) suggested that the deeper levels of reflection involve becoming aware of the social and cultural origins or our personally held assumptions. In this way, Mezirowian reflection respects the sociological position that insists on the need to recognize discourses, social structures and culturally held assumptions. This connection may as well be utilized in practices aiming to promote reflection while utilizing the knowledge of edge-emotions. In the end, the social structures and cultural attitudes are not something only external to the learner, but have their adhesion in his or her meaning perspectives, where they serve to keep up the coherence of the personal meaning structures, thus enabling the individual to make meaning and viable interpretations within the light of previous experiences.

Finally, the presented theorization offers conceptual tools to re-vitalize the discussion on reflection with regard to both theory and practice. Thus it is not intended to close the case of reflection but to reopen it with new vigour. Further work needs to be done that explicates the link between the theory and the practices associated with reflection. In the future we hope to show how the practices embody the theory and how the results produced by these practices modify and refine the theory.

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## **Reflection on Teaching in Higher Education: Critically reflective processes of Greek academics in Hard, Soft, Pure and Applied disciplines**

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### **Abstract**

In this study, we build upon Biglan-Becher's typology of academic disciplines (Soft/Applied, Hard/Applied, Soft/Pure and Hard/Pure), on the Teaching Perspectives Inventory, and on Kreber and Cranton's Soft model of reflection on university teaching, and we explore whether the extent to which academics from different disciplines engage in critical reflective processes is linked to (a) the epistemological structure of their discipline and (b) the teaching perspectives that dominate their discipline.

### **Introduction**

Improved teaching practice, as a result of critical reflection on it, may mean a lot within a system of mass Higher Education that is becoming increasingly more international, diverse and market-driven (Kreber and Castleden, 2009, p.528). Several studies have examined how reflection might play a role in academic's pedagogical growth (Brookfield, 1995; Cranton, 1998). Mc Alpine's research, contributed to the understanding of teacher thinking in Higher Education and further elaborated on the role of reflection in the construction of teaching knowledge (Mc Alpine et al., 1999; Mc Alpine and Weston, 2000). Their focus on reflection on university teaching lead to an empirically and inductively derived metacognitive model that operationalizes the process of reflection.

To this direction, the extensive work of Kreber and Cranton (2000), and Kreber (2005) lead to the construction of a model of reflection, the Scholarship of Teaching (Soft) model, deduced directly from Mezirow's work. It suggests that academics might engage in content, process and premise reflection in their day to day teaching. Furthermore, it contends that there are two different sources of knowledge construction in teaching: personal teaching experience and educational research theory. The model also distinguishes three different but interrelated domains of knowledge in teaching within which each of the three kinds of reflection might occur: Instructional (instructional design), Pedagogical (knowledge of how students learn and of how to facilitate learning) and Curricular (knowledge of the goals, purposes and rationales for their classes/courses). The three types of reflection within each of the three domains yield a three by three matrix, resulting in nine different forms of reflection. Additionally, a list of conceptually derived and empirically tested indicators involving concrete actions, (Kreber and Cranton, 2000; Kreber, 2004, 2005) from which the instructors' engagement in specific forms of reflection could be inferred, is also suggested by the model. These indicators work as a "test of validity" of an instructor's assumptions and beliefs within the three domains of learning: instrumental, communicative and emancipatory.

As university teaching is firmly located within academic disciplines, broadly categorized in terms of their epistemological structure (cognitive and social dimensions), Kreber and Castleden (2009), based on the Soft model, explored whether academics from different fields engage in reflective practice differently.

This study builds upon Kreber's research and focuses on the reflective processes that academics from different disciplines engage in as they approach their day to day teaching. More specifically, it explores whether the extent to which academics from different disciplines engage in critical reflective processes is linked to the epistemological structure of their discipline, and/or the teaching perspectives that dominate their discipline. We opted to (a) work with an existing model of reflection (SofT model) on university teaching that emphasizes reflective processes, and (b) use the Biglan-Becher typology for distinguishing the disciplines in four clusters, each manifesting its own epistemological characteristics: Hard/Pure (H/P), Hard/Applied (H/A), Soft/Pure (S/P) and Soft/Applied (S/A) (see also: Neumann et al., 2002; Biglan, 1973).

### **Methodology**

This study is part of a larger investigation employing both a qualitative and a quantitative methodology, with the qualitative methodology being here the dominant one.

### *Sample*

Data were collected from 26 academic teaching staff. Participants were purposefully sampled for field of study and dominant teaching perspective. Participants came from S/A, H/A, S/P and H/P disciplines, from 15 Departments of 4 Greek Universities, namely: National and Capodistrian University of Athens, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Patras and University of Thessaly (see Table 1 below).

### *Instrumentation*

Two different sources of data were used: (1) Pratt and Collin's (Pratt & associates, 2005; [www.teachingperspective.com](http://www.teachingperspective.com)) Teaching Perspective Inventory (TPI) and (2) semi-structured interviews. Data were collected from the fall term of 2011 until the winter term of 2012.

### *Teaching Perspectives Inventory*

The 26 academics (N=114 in the larger study) completed the TPI. The TPI measures all five of an instructor's perspectives and identifies their one (or two) dominant ones. Teaching perspectives are defined as interrelated systems of beliefs and intentions which give meaning and justification for the actions of the instructor, and which constitute the lens through which he or she sees the world of teaching and learning (Pratt and associates, 2005, p. 33).

<b>Table 1: Distribution of the Sample of 26 Respondents</b>			
<b>Discipline</b>	<b>Departments</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Dominant Teaching Perspective/s</b>
<b>SOFT APPLIED (S/A)</b>	Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education	1	Nurturing
	Special Education	2	1.Nurturing & Developmental 1. Nurturing
	Primary Education	1	Nurturing & Social Reform
	Law	2	1.Nurturing 1. Nurturing &Transmission
<b>HARD APPLIED (H/A)</b>	Electrical and Computer Engineering of the Technical University	3	2.Transmission & Apprenticeship 1.Transmission
	Computer Engineering and Informatics of the Technical University	1	Transmission
	Dentistry	2	1.Transmission & Apprenticeship 1.Apprenticeship
<b>SOFT PURE (S/P)</b>	Sociology	2	1.Developmental & Nurturing 1. Developmental
	Linguistics	2	1.Developmental & Social Reform 1. Developmental
	Philosophy	2	1.Developmental 1. Developmental & Nurturing
	Economics	2	1.Developmental & Transmission 1. Developmental
<b>HRRD PURE (H/P)</b>	Physics	2	1Transmission & Apprenticeship. 1 Transmission
	Chemistry	2	Transmission
	Mathematics	2	1Transmission 1 Transmission & Nurturing

These perspectives are:

1. “Transmission”: Effective teaching requires a substantial commitment to the content or subject matter.
2. “Apprenticeship”: Effective teaching is a process of socializing students into new behavioural norms and ways of working.
3. “Developmental”: Effective teaching must be planned and conducted "from the learner's point of view".
4. “Nurturing”: Effective teaching assumes that long-term, hard, persistent effort to succeed comes from the heart, not the head and must respect the learner's self-concept and self-efficacy.
5. “Social Reform”: Effective teaching seeks to change society in substantive ways.

(see Pratt and associates, 2005 for a more detailed description of the 5 perspectives)

The TPI consists of 45 items clustered into three groups of 15 items (15 Beliefs, 15 Intentions and 15 Educational Actions). For each of the five perspectives, 3 of the 15 items of each group describe the Beliefs of the instructors in relation to learning, teaching, and knowledge, their Intentions, and their Educational Actions respectively. The items relevant to the Actions and the Intentions are rated along a 5-point scale ranging from “Never” to “Always”, while those relevant to their Beliefs are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.”

### *Interviews*

All 26 academics participated in semi-structured face to face interviews. They were informed to focus on their experience teaching a particular course (undergraduate and/or graduate). Interviews lasted between 60 and 130 min. Interview questions were based on the SofT model (see Kreber, 2005, pp.354-355). All 26 interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. They were analyzed by conducting a first-level content analysis whereby participants' responses were compared to the processes suggested by the SofT model. Specifically, it was explored whether: (1) academic staff engaged in reflection in the domains of instructional, pedagogical, and curricular knowledge, (2) they engaged in content, process, and premise reflection, within each knowledge domain, (3) there are differences in the extent to which academics from the 4 clusters of disciplines engage in reflection in the three domains. We, then, counted the number of concrete indicators of reflection (recording the same indicator every time it was found with different individuals in the same sample - see Table 3). This was done separately for the instructors from each of the 4 clusters of disciplines. Finally, based on the analysis, we developed a list of additional indicators of reflection.

### **Findings**

The first main findings of this study are briefly presented in this section. All but 7 of Kreber's indicators of critical reflection were also identified in this study. These 7 indicators not identified in this study are the following: “Reflecting on meaningfulness of appropriateness of goals in a journal” (Kreber and Castleden, 2009, p.523), “Using the rep grid method to understand what goes on in students' minds as they are reading” (p.522), “Having students talk to each other and then compose half a

page on what they liked or what they'd like to see differently about the activity” “Sharing why certain approaches work at teaching-related conferences” (p.521), “Comparing insights gained from teaching-related workshops and seminars to one's one teaching”, “Presenting findings from classroom teaching experiments at teaching-related sessions at conferences” (Kreber, 2005, p.340) and “Writing articles in discipline-specific journals on how to teach a certain subject that challenges traditional pedagogies” (Kreber and Castleden, 2009, p.521). In addition, many of the indicators identified in Kreber and Castleden's study with an S/P sample were also identified in this study but with participants from other disciplines: indicators 2, 3, 4, 5 -Curricular Knowledge/Premise R.- (p.523), indicators 3, 5, 7-Instructional Kn./Process R.- (p.521) and 5,6,8 -Instructional Kn./Premise R.- (pp.521-522).

All academics provided evidence of engagement in content reflection. Nine (9) of the 26 academics (34.6%) were not able to recall incidents indicating premise reflection on the following domains: Curricular knowledge (4-15.4%- 2 from H/P and 2 from S/P fields), Pedagogical knowledge (3 -11.5%- 1 from H/A, 1 from H/P and 1 from S/P disciplines) and Instructional knowledge (2-7.8%- both derived from H/A disciplines). Only 1 instructor (3.8%) did not engage in process reflection (domain of Instructional knowledge, from H/A fields). Interestingly, 15 academics (57.7%) from all the 4 clusters of disciplines provided evidence of premise reflection on the 3 domains of knowledge (7 on Curricular, 5 on Instructional and 3 on Pedagogical knowledge), based exclusively on additional indicators identified in this study.

Examples of these additional indicators of process and premise reflection on the 3 domains of knowledge are given in Table 2 below. On the one hand, these additional indicators test empirically Kreber's conceptual SoFT model. On the other hand, they confirm Kreber's (2006, p.103) notion that other indicators than the ones suggested by her are clearly possible.



<b>Table 2: Additional Indicators</b>		
<b>Knowledge Domain</b>	<b>Indicators/ Level of Reflection</b>	
<p><b>CURRICULAR</b></p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE</b></p>	<p><b>Process Reflection</b></p> <p>Comparing teaching goals with the experiences I have gained from my personal professional engagement in fields relative to my teaching subject area.</p> <p>Comparing my goals with current trends in the international scientific community relevant to my discipline (current scientific/research advances, curricula in equivalent foreign schools, guidelines from international scientific organizations, cooperation with foreign universities).</p> <p>Comparing my goals with anything that research on my subject area or more generally the study of other disciplines (philosophy, sociology, psychology, etc) conveys.</p>	<p><b>Premise Reflection</b></p> <p>Receiving feedback from graduates on the impact of my goals on their current professional practice.</p> <p>Re-negotiating goals following the feedback I receive from the tutors of the students.</p> <p>Using the literature (scientific journals) on my discipline in order to redefine my goals.</p>
	<p><b>PEDAGOGICAL</b></p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE</b></p>	<p>Employing colleagues or other students as “informants”, so that they can elicit the opinion of the students on my course (how well they learned).</p> <p>Following advice and attending the teaching of experienced educators of other levels.</p> <p>Studying the literature on learning and connecting</p>

	<p>my conceptions and practices with what I learned.</p> <p>Confirming the way of learning of my students from the application of knowledge in authentic contexts of professional practice (from practice to knowledge and not vice-versa).</p>	<p>which leads to a revision of conceptions/beliefs and practices or the search for more effective teaching practices.</p> <p>Questioning the sufficiency of the final tests as the only assessment indicator for learning and experimenting with alternative methods of assessment.</p> <p>Revising at regular intervals the teaching content and the teaching approach by taking advantage of my personal experience concerning teaching and learning.</p> <p>Self-awareness, self-assessment or even assessment from the students, understanding of my deficits as a teacher, lead me to an attempt for self-improvement.</p>
<p><b>INSTRUCTIONAL</b></p> <p><b>KNOWLEDGE</b></p>	<p>Drawing knowledge and validation concerning the effectiveness of my practices from authentic frameworks of application of my teaching subject, and methods for the transmission of my professional knowledge applied in that context (mentorship).</p> <p>Comparing my teaching practices with the way peers make their presentations in conferences.</p>	<p>Rejecting, after critical evaluation, certain teaching techniques or teaching paradigms (e.g. teacher-centered, use of power-point presentations, etc).</p> <p>Discussing about the teaching practices with the students as an important factor of optimization or change of my practices.</p> <p>Reflecting on the knowledge conveyed by my personal studies and</p>

	Developing a network of formal or informal communication with colleagues and exchanging experiences, concerns on teaching practice issues.	the attendance of conferences, and re-adjusting accordingly my teaching practices.  Following current trends concerning the teaching practices applied in other education levels, I re-adjust accordingly my teaching practices.  By observing the teaching of my colleagues during their assessment process or the way they make their presentations in conferences, I readjust my teaching practice.
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For providing examples of responses received when exploring process and premise reflection in the 3 domains of knowledge, excerpts of interviews are further included.

Negative example of premise reflection on Curricular knowledge:

Interviewer: Have you ever critically reflected on whether the goals/purposes and rational that you identified for your course make a difference to student learning?

Instructor from S/P discipline (Sociology): "...Yes of course...but my personal view is that I cannot check this (my students' learning) because my students are receiving many stimuli from different instructors and each one of them adopts a personal teaching approach.."

<b>Domains of Knowledge/Levels of Reflection</b>	<b>Soft/Applied</b>	<b>Hard/Applied</b>	<b>Soft/Pure</b>	<b>Hard/Pure</b>
Curricular/Pro.R	60	24	44	29
Pedagogical/Pro.R	125	51	81	51
Instructional/Pro.R	39	20	22	20
<b>Total/ Pro. R.</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>100</b>
Curricular/Prem.R	36	18	14	8
Pedagogical/Prem.R	43	14	21	9
Instructional/Prem.R	39	11	19	14
<b>Total/Prem. R</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>31</b>
<b><i>Total/Pro &amp; Prem.R</i></b>	<b><i>342</i></b>	<b><i>138</i></b>	<b><i>211</i></b>	<b><i>131</i></b>

Positive example of premise reflection on Curricular knowledge:

Instructor from H/P discipline (Chemistry) "...Of course... what I have to teach and they have to learn is aligned with the needs of the labor market...what I teach must be associated with the qualifications required from employers nowadays..."

Note that in the first example the respondent although declares that he is critically reflecting, he cannot provide evidence. Furthermore, he is not in the position to distinguish between teaching goals/purposes and approaches. The case is quite the opposite in the second example where the evidence provided is clear and directly connected to the purposes and rationale of his course.

Positive example for premise reflection on Instructional Knowledge:

Interviewer: If someone told you *'I don't think it makes any difference whether or not you use these methods that you already mentioned?'* What would your reaction be?

Instructor from H/A discipline (Computer engineering): "...on the last course of each semester, I discuss with my students about their experience from my lessons and the methods used...what they did or didn't like...this is an important feedback for me... and the following year I modify my methods based on this feedback..."

Positive example for process reflection on Pedagogical knowledge:

Interviewer: Considering the course you are currently teaching, how do you know that you are successfully helping your students learn?

Instructor from S/A discipline (Education): "... mostly it is the feedback that I take from my students' tutors...pages and pages of comments regarding the students' learning, knowledge and skills development etc..."

Furthermore across all the levels of reflection, reflection was oriented primarily towards personal experience rather than formal knowledge about teaching (participation in workshops, research, readings etc.).

Finally, correlation between instructors' dominant teaching perspective and their scores on the distribution of total indicators of process and premise reflection can be inferred. Indeed, S/A disciplines are dominated by the Nurturing perspective and S/P by the Developmental. Instructors from these fields gave much more evidence of the 2 levels of reflection on the 3 domains of Knowledge than their colleagues from H/A and H/P fields. H/P and H/A instructors mainly oriented towards the Transmission perspective gave much less, and almost equivalent, evidence of the 2 levels of reflection on the 3 domains of Knowledge instead. Furthermore, concerning the S/A academics, it is important to notice that 4 out of 6 were trained in pedagogy. These 4 academics provided much more evidence of process reflection on Pedagogical knowledge and of premise reflection on Instructional knowledge.

## **Discussion**

An intriguing finding is that 7 indicators identified in Kreber's studies were not confirmed in this study. Among these 7 indicators, there were indicators such as "reflecting in a journal" or "using the rep grid method" or "having students discuss with each other". This exclusion could probably be attributed to Greek academics' professional traditions or to cultural factors. More specifically, on one hand, the majority of Greek instructors are not trained how to teach in order to familiarize with such practices. This lack of pedagogical training (such as teaching-related workshops, seminars etc.) is further highlighted by the majority of the instructors in their interviews. Also, it should be noted that the majority of the Greek academics stated that they do not attend teaching-related conferences or teaching-related sessions at

conferences. On the other hand, such practices seem to be incompatible with the culture of the Greek educational community. Pratt's (1999) view that "while individuals espouse their own conceptions of teaching, those beliefs and admonitions are apparently informed by, and are a reflection of larger social, cultural, historical, and/or disciplinary contexts within which people live and work" may also constitute a possible interpretative framework for the exclusion of these 7 indicators.

The finding that many of the indicators identified in Kreber and Castleden's (2009) study with S/P sample were also identified in this study but in other disciplines is also noteworthy. Kreber and Castleden's (2009, p.526) notion that "discipline-specific traditions and boundaries might be less pronounced at the level of day to day reflections on teaching even though certain differences can be observed", offers a possible interpretation.

Another intriguing finding of this study is the additional indicators for the three domains of knowledge and the two levels of reflection. This finding is possibly attributed to the fact that in this study there were four clusters of disciplines instead of two (H/S and H/P) explored by Kreber and Castleden (2009). It also brings forth issues of the historic, social, and cultural influences on instructors and raises issues of personal philosophy and individual approach of the discipline, the subject matter, and the students (Prosser et al., 2005; Kreber, 2009, pp.26-27; Pratt, 1999). All these issues constitute equally important factors contributing to the interpretation of similarities and differences relevant to the additional indicators found across different disciplines in culturally differed departments (concerning the Greek respondents) and instructors (Greek sample and Kreber's sample). Furthermore, these additional indicators were identified mostly in S/A and S/P disciplines and to a lesser extent in H/A and H/P fields. This was also the case in Kreber's indicators. It is probably the epistemological structure of Soft and Hard disciplines that leads to these differences. Indeed, instructors in Soft fields approach teaching and learning in a different way than their colleagues in Hard fields. Academics in Soft disciplines are more oriented towards teaching, active learning methods, deep learning, and student-focused approaches. Instructors in Hard fields, on the contrary, are oriented more towards the teaching content and less towards the processes of active and reflective information processing by the student, they engage the student less in the teaching-learning process, while they are more focused on the subject matter of the discipline (Braxton et al., 1998; Nelson et al. 2006; Norton et al., 2005, pp.554-555). These approaches of the instructors are attributed to the different features of Hard disciplines (e.g. well-defined content and teaching methods applied), compared to the features of Soft disciplines (e.g. more loosely organized knowledge structure, deviations in the teaching content and the mainly active teaching practices employed) (Singer, 1996, pp.665-675).

Interestingly, Greek instructors from the 4 clusters of disciplines gave more indicators of process reflection for the domains of Pedagogical and Curricular than in Instructional knowledge. With regards to the domain of Pedagogical knowledge, this finding is intriguing, considering that the majority of the instructors (except 4 of them, from the fields of Education and Special Education -S/A fields-) have not received any formal training on teaching. Concerning the domain of Curricular knowledge, it is clear that the goals instructors identify as a result of reflection within this domain influence the reflective processes in the other two domains (Kreber, 2006, p.96; Pratt and associates, 2005, p.21), a fact that possibly explains the aforementioned finding. It is noteworthy that the majority of Greek instructors (19/26) provided a statement of the reasonable and causal connection between their teaching goals, their beliefs about

teaching and learning and their subsequent teaching actions. However, it still remains an intriguing finding that Greek instructors from the 4 clusters of disciplines, unlike the H/P (Kreber, 2004, 2005) and like the S/P (Kreber and Castleden, 2009) ones consisting Kreber's sample, provided more evidence on process reflection for the domain of Curricular knowledge.

Premise reflection, the questioning of presuppositions, or "critical reflection" (Mezirow, 1991), was not common in any of the three knowledge domains (see also Kreber, 2004, 2005; Kreber and Castleden, 2009). Greek instructors mostly from S/A and S/P fields provided evidence of premise reflection, more frequently observed within the domains of Pedagogical and Instructional Knowledge. As this was not the case primarily for the instructors in H/A disciplines and in a lesser extent for the instructors in H/P fields one might attribute this finding to the epistemological structure of the Hard disciplines. Kreber and Castleden (2009, p.527), citing Huber and Morreal (2002), argue that "the kinds of questions faculty have learned to ask about the knowledge of the discipline are, to an extent, a mirror image of the questions they ask about their teaching". This notion seems to converge with the characteristics of the epistemological structure of these fields as opposed to the characteristics of the Soft fields, as already commented. It seems that premises remain unquestioned, or taken for granted, more so in Hard disciplines than in Soft ones.

Indeed, Greek instructors from S/A and S/P disciplines provided more evidence on process and premise reflection for the three domains of knowledge than their H/A and H/P counterparts and this is probably also attributed to the teaching perspectives dominating their disciplines (Nurturing and Developmental respectively). Nurturing perspective is based on a belief in the critical relationship between learner's self-concept and learning. Instructor's primary role, according to this perspective, is to foster a climate of trust and respect, to engage empathetically with individual needs, to enhance learner's self-esteem, to encourage expressions of feeling, and to challenge people, while also caring about them (Pratt and associates, 2005, pp. 239-240). With regards to the Developmental perspective, the belief in the potential emergence of increasingly complex and sophisticated forms of thought, related to one's content, discipline or practice is fundamental. Teachers that espouse this perspective challenge student understanding of content, provide more questions than answers in order to change student's cognitive structures and foster deep approaches to learning (Pratt and associates, 2005, pp.234-235). Developmental and Nurturing perspectives are considered mainly student-centred. Most studies examining the relation between the conceptions of teaching and the disciplines, highlight the prevalence of student-centred perspectives in the Soft fields compared to the Hard fields (see for example Norton et al. 2005; Singer 1996). It is possible therefore that teaching perspectives have an impact on the extent to which academics engage in reflection, and that there is a relationship between student-centred conceptions of teaching, the epistemological structure of the Soft disciplines and the process and premise reflection across the three domains of knowledge (see also Kreber and Castleden, 2009, p.526; Kreber, 2005, p.353).

Finally, and as this study is in progress, further analysis of the interviews' data may also reveal relationships between the level of internal and across perspectives consistency of respondents' dominant perspectives and the level of reflection across the three domains of knowledge. Also, commonalities and differences in the range of different indicators (Kreber's and additional) and the nature of learning (Instrumental, Communicative and Emancipatory) across the three domains of knowledge with the four clusters of disciplines (and subsequently the teaching perspectives that dominate

them), constitute the following step of the analysis.

### **Conclusions**

Two main conclusions can be inferred from the previous discussion of the results:

First, the extent to which academics from different disciplines engage in critical reflective processes is linked to the epistemological structure of their discipline. This was true for the distinction between the Soft and the Hard fields, since in the former instructors provided more evidence of process and premise reflection for the three domains of knowledge than in the latter.

Second, that teaching perspectives have an impact on the extent to which academics engage in reflection. This study confirmed the relationship between student-centred conceptions of teaching (Nurturing and Developmental) in the Soft fields and the higher levels of process and premise reflection across the three domains of knowledge attributed to these perspectives.

Furthermore, with regards to the additional indicators of process and premise reflection for the three domains of knowledge found in this study, it is important to highlight the impact of different discipline-specific traditions and cultures on concrete activities reported by instructors from different departmental and disciplinary contexts when engaged in critical reflection. It is also important the notion that these indicators may reflect different social, historical and cultural larger contexts within which academics live and work.

In any case, instructors' personal philosophy or teaching perspective, their individual approach of the discipline, of the teaching and learning process, of their students and their teaching subject, play a significant role in the way that they engage in process and premise reflection on their goals, their knowledge of how students learn and of how to facilitate learning, and of their subsequent instructional design.

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## **Transformative learning: Towards a holistic approach**

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### **Abstract**

The present study lays the foundations for an integrated theory of transformative learning. Hence, it seeks to point out that transformative theories of learning have traditionally over-relied on rational and cognitive processes, while it argues that, in a holistic transformation, cognitive, somatic, affective, and spiritual domains are closely interrelated.

### **Introduction**

Adult education and learning are inherently intertwined with change, change in knowledge, understanding, attitudes, beliefs, skills and/or behaviours. Traditionally, theory and research in adult education have examined learning as a purely cognitive process, drawing on rationality and cognitivism, such as in experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), critical thinking (Brookfield, 1989), reflective practice (Schön, 1983) and transformative learning (Freire, 1972, Mezirow, 1991).

At the heart of the foregoing conceptual frameworks of adult education and learning, there is found centrality of experience, along with transformative learning, perceiving learning in adulthood as a means of personal and social transformation. It is practically assumed that adults have the ability to reflect critically on their assumptions. As a result, adult learning constitutes a transformative rather than an assimilating process (Freire, 1972; Mezirow, 1991). As posited by Mezirow (2005), instead of focusing on the adult learner as andragogy and, to a large extent, self-directing learning theories have done, transformative learning evolves around the cognitive process of meaning making. Hence, it constitutes a dynamic interpretative framework for contextualising adult learning as a powerful lever of transformation.

Furthermore, transformative learning forms predominately an adult learning theory, as it is grounded on adult daily experience and a higher level of cognitive functioning than that reached in childhood. In effect, it constitutes a means of resolving contradictions in a dialectical fashion. In this respect, mediated by raising awareness of novel possibilities and perspectives, it thereby becomes a process of moving towards more complex ways of viewing ourselves and where we stand, potentially leading to raising personal responsibility for the societies we live in (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddlen, 2000).

In the essence of transformative learning theory, there is found the assumption that a sudden or dramatic event, or even incremental with smaller transformation, may induce changes in individuals, in ways that both themselves and others can recognise. Indeed, having emerged in the context of adult learning theory, it moves away from traditional educational practices of rigid memorisation, analytically describing processes that challenge current knowledge frames (Adamson & Bailie, 2012). It is grounded on constructivist - developmental approaches, drawing on rationality and

cognitive processes as a means of effective perspective transformation, such as in Habermas' (1970), Kohlberg's (1981), Loevinger's (1976), Piaget's (1954) and Riegel's (1973) works. In this context, influential transformative learning theories have been proposed by Freire (1972), Kolb (1984), and more recently by Mezirow (1991).

However, recent studies, such as by Clark (2005), Dirkx (2001), Dixon and Baltes (1996), Heshusious and Ballard (1996), Meyer (2012), Michelon (1998), and Mulvihill (2003), have shifted emphasis towards more holistic approaches, perceiving the individual as a whole, consisting of mind, body and spirit. In this regard, in the present study we argue that in order a holistic transformation to take place, it requires the involvement of the whole person, entailing mind, body and spirit. Through thorough review of relevant studies, the present paper seeks to point out that transformative theories of learning have traditionally over-relied on rational and cognitive processes in describing perspective transformation, while it makes the assumption that for effective transformative learning to take place, cognitive, somatic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions are closely interrelated.

### **A review of Transformative Learning Theories**

#### *Freire's social- emancipatory theories of transformative learning*

Paulo Freire's theory of transformative learning is a socio-cultural approach to transformative learning. According to Freire (1972) personal empowerment and social transformations are two inseparable processes. Getting emancipated from false consciousness requires political action aimed at changing the world. Paulo Freire worked with villagers in his home-country, Brazil, helping them to gain literacy skills through the process of "conscientisation", namely an ongoing process wherein the individuals become increasingly aware of the social and political conditions under which they lead, becoming eventually agents of social change.

The conscientisation framework is ultimately what enables individuals undergoing the "awakening" experience to engage in an authentic dialectical process, starting with contemplating on their pre-constructed biases, concepts and assumptions, and gradually moving on to identifying interconnections and broader meaning of the world they live in.

#### *Kolb's model of experiential learning*

David Kolb, being the theorist most closely associated with experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), proposed a model on the underlying structure of experiential learning as an ongoing process of experiencing and adaptation to the world rather than a mere series of outcomes. He came up with a cyclical four-stage model to conceptualise this process (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and the active experimentation). The cycle begins with the learner being involved in a concrete experience, going on with reflecting on this experience and attributing meaning to it. Then, the learner integrates the meaning drawn from this particular experience into the established network of previous experiences to formulate abstract concepts and reach conclusions, which finally lead to new concrete experiences.

It is evident that Kolb's cycle accounts for the way learners can make out abstract generalisations from concrete experiences and develop concepts for future experimentation, based on their reflection. Hence, experiential learning is often defined as learning by doing, however, it actually refers to learning as a result of reflection on doing (Hillier, 2005).

#### *Mezirow's psycho-critical model of transformative learning*

Jack Mezirow is regarded as the “father” of transformative learning, despite the fact that he has acknowledged his being influenced by Paulo Freire. However, while Freire (1972) emphasised the need for transformative learning at the social level, Mezirow's theory (1991, 2000) concentrates primarily on the process of personal transformation and empowerment. Precisely, he argues that transformative learning is a form of learning through which previously uncritically assimilated beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and emotional reactions are questioned and thereby become more explicit and thoroughly validated.

Mezirow believes that transformations involve both changes in meaning schemes and changes in meaning perspectives of reference frames. A meaning scheme is a specific set of beliefs, biases, feelings, attitudes and knowledge, while a frame of reference offers an integrated set of meaning schemes, assumptions and expectations through which individuals filter their experiences. Mezirow (1991) additionally suggests that reflection has three main purposes to serve: to guide action, to add coherence to the unfamiliar and to reassess the justifications of what already known. The last one is pivotal to critical reflection and works towards re-examining and potentially transforming the structure of assumptions through which a learner makes meaning. Mezirow goes on to say that assumptions are in effect structured through socialisation processes, pointing out that in adulthood individuals reassess the assumptions they acquired during childhood, often in response to disorienting dilemmas that challenge their perspective and their frame of reference for interpreting reality. In this regard, he suggests that the transformational process unravels in ten consecutive stages:

1. A disorienting dilemma,
2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame,
3. a critical evaluation of assumptions
4. recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions
6. formulating a course of action
7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. provisional trying of new roles
9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2000, p.22)

### **Towards a holistic approach of transformative learning**

As mentioned in the beginning of this work, all the above theories of transformative learning are based on cognitive function. In other words, arguments are weighted, evidence is evaluated and conclusions are drawn.

Since the 1990s transformative learning has been the central theme in adult education. Almost every year transformative learning conferences take place both in national and international settings. However, there has been a growing number of researchers who argue that the various models of transformative learning over-rely on rationality and cognitive processes as the means of effective perspective transformation. They actually assume that rational thinking is basically a Western concept, since researchers in the West tend to ignore the body, emotions, and spirit as valid learning agents, limiting thus learning to a cognitive process that takes place in the mind. This emphasis on the mind emanates from Descartes' wide influence in Western science and philosophy, denoting “I think, therefore I am”, separating entirely the mind from the body. The segregation between mind and body was reinforced by the Enlightenment philosophers who largely argued that knowledge could be obtained only through

reason (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). This led to the Cartesian dualism, the mind/body split which privileges reason and delegitimises the body as a mode of knowing (Bordo, 1987).

In this regard, Meyer (2012) suggested two further reasons accounting for the emphasis on cognitive processes. The first is rooted in childhood, since most individuals have been socialised to assume play and work as being incompatible. The second reason is grounded in the operational aim of the workplace, as it mainly concerns the outcomes, that is, the products of the services provided and not the opportunities created for embodied learning and development. Hence, embodied and affective learning have been regarded as biased and undesirable. As pointed out by Heshusious and Ballard, (1996), learning has been considered useful for our intimate lives but not for claiming knowledge about the world.

However, human beings consist of mind, body and spirit. Despite this fact, body, emotions and spirit have rarely been taken into account in debates on learning and knowing. Most individuals can recall a time when understanding was reached while in the process of doing something. Many of us are acquainted with the ancient Chinese saying “what I hear I forget, what I see I remember, what I do I understand”. In learning therefore, both the learning outcomes and the action taken are synonymous (Howden, 2012). This approach to learning has been originated in the West by Dewey (1938), who stressed that we actually “learn by doing”. Learning by doing is a holistic experience in which the whole person is engaged and on which learning is grounded, making it evident that ways of learning and knowing, beyond the cognitive domain, are equally important.

In this context, in an interesting work by Michelon (1998), it is advocated that the concept of experiential learning is directly linked to the concept of “thinking with the body”. In the same vein, the notion of tacit knowledge proposed by Polanyi (1969), suggests that knowledge begins in the body. Tacit knowledge actually refers to the fact that people are able to possess knowledge even though this knowledge cannot be expressed in words, while it involves the ability to formulate and solve problems within complicated and unstructured settings (Dixon & Balters 1996; Polanyi, 1969). As Polanyi (1969, p.147-148) has noteworthy put it forward:

*“Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts. Such is the exceptional position of our body in the universe”.*

Mathews (1998, p.27) has also referred to embodied learning as “the embodied experience of being and doing” overtly expressed “at the heart of the arts and applied culture”. He recalls his early schooling when he was obliged to sit still and “endure”, rather than be actively engaged in learning. The only exception was his fifth-grade teacher who mastered the power of embodied action, formulating rituals, while providing white lab coats for pupils to wear. The teacher explained that when pupils put on the coats they can be easily transformed into scientists.

According to Clark (2005, p.211-212), the reemergence of the body as a source of knowledge is due to various reasons. The first one is related to the feminist movement, as, inter alia, the cause for which women had been marginalised in Western culture, has been highly concerned with the body. Consciousness-raising groups served as a source of embodied learning as women examined how patriarchy oppressed them through the regulation of the body. What has been considered secret and shameful began to be the object of study and public exposure. This approach has been extensively developed by feminists, who perceive the body as the foundation for women's conceptualisation of the self and the construction of knowledge. The second

reason is associated with our everyday experience. In effect, everybody has been involved in stressful situations, while most of us have had the disconcerting experience of stress, manifesting itself in our bodies far before our brains manage to figure out what exactly the trouble is. Finally, the third reason is related to the fact that the body as a site of learning provides actually a more authentic conceptualisation for us as persons.

Furthermore, closely aligned to embodied learning is affective learning. Nowadays, it is widely acknowledged that due to the fact that receptors are located throughout the human body, emotions can be stored and mediated by parts of our bodies other than the brain (Merriam, 2005). In an interesting work, Dirkx (2001) challenges the cognitively based concept of transformative learning as being limited in scope. Dirkx believes that learning itself is inherently an imaginative, emotional act and that significant learning is impossible without emotion. Actually, imagination must be nurtured with its own kind of nourishment. Dirkx (2001) carries on to say that it is through emotions that deeply personal meaningful connections are made so that learning can effectively take place.

Along the same lines, Taylor (2000) states that transformative learning has granted too much importance on critical reflection and underestimated the role of emotions and feelings in the process of transformation. Moreover, he argues that several studies have indicated that people's emotions must be worked through before they can engage in critical reflection. In the same vein, Mulvihill (2003) emphasises the importance that the affective domain plays in transformative learning experiences of survivors of clergy abuse. He posits that when learners are encouraged to uncover the emotional impact of their perspectives and meanings and to integrate the new information through alternative learning channels, a holistic transformative model has to be embraced. In relation to this, Kramer (2000) argues that most emotional existential dilemmas in life do not tend to be resolved through the linear model proposed by Mezirow (1991). She carries on to stress that such dilemmas require alternative modes of representation, such as art, metaphor and non linear logic.

Furthermore, Taylor (2000) points out that research on transformative learning has confirmed the importance of relationships. In other words, for effective transformation to take place, in addition to rational discourses, relational discourses are indispensable, as well. It is common place nowadays that transformative learning is an interdependent process built on trust and involvement of other individuals, rather than an independent act. In the same vein, Glaser (1988) argues that most issues are associated with relationships, with other individuals exerting direct influence over one's own thinking and behaviour, once again stressing that learning is as much affective as it is cognitive.

In this respect, it can be argued that there is a direct link between holistic learning and engaging in collective action. Relevant studies (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008; Nitschke & Malvicini, 2013; Yorks & Marsick, 2000) have indicated that through combining rational learning with affective, intuitive, and spiritual ways of knowing, individuals may develop a critical awareness, whereby contributing to the transformation of both their lives and the communities they live in (Shor, 1992). Precisely, research findings have depicted that holistic approaches in transformative learning can foster meaning making, empowerment, and the emergence of self-managing groups (Nitschke & Malvicini, 2013), helping learners develop a critical engagement with their organisational and social world, increasingly recognising that the existing state of affairs does not exhaust all possibilities and arriving at alternative courses of action. (Yorks & Marsick, 2000)

Additionally, in their study in the context of an African nation, Merriam and Ntseane (2008) have noticed that some of the events that triggered the transformational learning process were seen as being caused by forces beyond the natural world, set within individuals' spiritual system. It was therefore concluded that one's cultural context shapes transformational learning, as cultural values largely determine the choice of assumptions to examine and the new perspectives and subsequent behaviours to engage in.

Hence, alike embodied and emotional learning, spiritual learning has also to do with meaning-making (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Although most people believe that they are corporal and thinking beings, their image of the adults as learners pertains to being “merely an animal to be socialised, a computer to be programmed, a unit of production to be harnessed and utilised, a consumer to be won” (Sloan, 2005:27). Formal programmes in fact suffer from order, hierarchies, grades, tests, a gloried past, control, deprivation, remoteness of various kinds, and weighty seriousness (Moore, 2005).

Conversely, spirituality revolves around personal beliefs and experience of a divine spirit or higher purpose, determining how we construct meaning, and what we individually and collectively experience and attend to and honour as the “sacred” in our lives (Tisdell, 2003, p.29). Some similar words are grace, heart, flow, life force, and soul (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). As Kidd (1973) eloquently pointed out, spiritual learning involves the celebration, the affirmation, the enlargement of full consciousness and the search for that part of the individual that is really human. Likewise, Boyd (1989, 1991) argues that transformation is an inner journey of individualisation from parts of the psyche such as ego and the collective unconscious. It is in effect the process of knowing through reflection on the psychic structures.

Thus, taking in account that, according to Mezirow (1991), one of the most important learning tasks in adulthood, is making meaning, we think that to the extent that somatic, affective and spiritual domains are concerned with meaning-making, they can be considered equally useful in providing a convincing rationale for interpreting adult learning. However, relevant research is rather limited in this area, calling for further investigation.

## **Conclusions**

The present paper has attempted to lay the foundations for an integrated theory of transformative learning. Traditionally, theory and research in adult education have examined learning as a purely cognitive process. In this context transformative learning theories have been a dynamic interpretative framework for contextualising learning as a powerful lever of transformation, primarily associated with adult learning, as resting on a higher level of cognitive functioning.

However, based on constructive-developmental theories and adopting a cognitive orientation, transformative learning has received a great deal of criticism as to its overreliance on linearity, rationality and cognitivism in effecting perspective transformation. In this regard, researchers argue that in order a significant transformation to take place, it requires the involvement of the whole person, entailing mind, body and spirit. Hence, transformative learning theories should be extended to include, besides cognitive, somatic, affective and spiritual domains, ultimately imitating everyday life in which all four dimensions coexist and interact in all human action.

When we come to knowing and learning, linear and fragmented approaches cannot

account for the perplexity of the human being, consisting of mind, body and spirit, and therefore all three of them should be taken into account. Hence, we think that further research, under the holistic learning spectrum, is required, in order to elucidate the obscure and complex processes of transformative learning.

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## **Transformative Learning in Youth**

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The concept and issue of Transformative Learning has always been related to adult learning and education. But when does adulthood start? How is the ability to practice Transformative Learning acquired? And how can this development be supported in youth activities and education?

### **The definition of Transformative Learning**

#### *The original definition*

Ever since Jack Mezirow as a professor of adult education launched the issue and concept of Transformative Learning in 1978 the possibility and ability of practicing this kind of learning has been related exclusively to adults.

This leaves some very important open questions about the definition of adulthood and how and when the possibility of Transformative Learning is established and eventually might be present or under development during childhood and especially during youth.

As an element in our cooperation through many years between youth research (BS) and learning research (KI) we have found it interesting and challenging to take up these questions, not least in connection with current tendencies in youth education: Is Transformative Learning a possibility in youth education, and if so, how and from which age may this possibility be promoted and supported?

#### *Some critical objections*

In Mezirow's understanding Transformative Learning deals with changes in the learner's meaning perspectives, frames of reference and habits of mind (Mezirow 1978, 1991). This understanding has from many sides been criticized for being too narrow, too cognitively oriented, and not sufficiently open to the emotional and social dimensions of learning and the situatedness of learning processes (e.g. Cranton (2005 [1994]), Dirkx (1997, 2006), Taylor (2009)).

Mezirow has certainly been open to this criticism, and in his later writings he has clearly accepted it and has especially been careful to mention the emotional aspects in various relevant connections (Mezirow, 2006, 2009). However, at the same time he has maintained the precedence of the cognitive area and the notion of the meaning perspectives as the central target area, whereby the emotional, social and situated dimensions have indirectly been placed as a type of concomitant phenomena.

In 2000 Robert Kegan most clearly set the stage for a new designation or definition of the target area by formulating the crucial question about "what form transforms?", but he did not suggest any new specific definition (Kegan, 2000).

#### *Two alternative definitions*

We shall not here go deeper into these questions but jump directly to two recent more radical proposals to solve the definition problem and thereby clear the way for new and more substantial discussions – the first of these being Mark Tennant's proposal to define Transformative Learning as learning involving changes in the self (which is actually identical with Carl Rogers' definition of "significant learning" from 1951), and the second being Knud Illeris' similar proposal

relating to changes in elements of the identity (Rogers 1951, Tennant 2012, Illeris 2014a, 2014b).

Both of these proposals have the advantage of being more comprehensive and including than Mezirow's meaning perspectives etc. and at the same time to relate to concepts which have been thoroughly elaborated in personal psychology and social psychology, and the concept of identity also to very much modern sociology and youth research (e.g. Giddens 1991, Beck 1992 [1986], Bauman 2000, Ashmore et al. 2001, Côté & Levine 2002, Jenkins 2004) – which is the reason why we shall here continue by relating to Illeris' proposal of defining Transformative Learning as comprising "all learning that implies changes in the identity of the learner" (Illeris 2014a, p. 40).

## **Identity development**

### *Identifications in childhood*

In connection with Transformative Learning it is important to observe that already when Erik Erikson in the 1950s and 1960s developed the modern concept of identity (Erikson 1950, 1968) he distinguished between what he called "identifications" in childhood and proper identity development in youth – the main difference being that identifications are transferred and assumed from parents and others whereas identity development implies (more or less) conscious choices.

We shall not here go into further details about this rather complex issue, which raises a lot of questions in relation to various developmental situations and courses. In the present connection it is, however, important to emphasize that Erikson's understanding excludes the possibility of Transformative Learning in childhood, and that changes of elements of identifications and the transfer from identifications into proper identity elements cannot be regarded as Transformative Learning.

### *Identity development in youth*

Thus we stick to Erikson's central understanding that identity is basically developed during the age of youth, but at the same time draw attention to the fact that whereas youth in the middle of the 1900s was regarded as a rather short period of 3-5 years between childhood and adulthood, it is today psychologically regarded as a very important and significant life age starting by early puberty at the age of 11-13 and lasting until a fairly stable and coherent identity formation has taken place, which actually today usually does not happen until the middle of the 20s or later.

The central mental challenge in youth is certainly the identity development, and this is also – consciously or unconsciously – the basic yardstick for individual behaviour and choices throughout this period.

Typically it starts by what the German youth researcher Thomas Ziehe has called "search movements" (Ziehe and Stubenrauch 1982), i.e. a kind of trial-and-error learning by which ideas and ways of behaviour are tried out in order to see the reactions of adults and peers. But gradually provisional identity elements are developed, some to be further elaborated, others to be rejected or replaced, and by and by identity patterns take form to which new elements can be added until a stable and coherent identity takes form.

Of course, this is a very short and schematic description of a very long and often tortuous process. In relation to Transformative Learning it is essential to realize that transformations cannot take place before there is something to transform, i.e. before some relatively stable identity elements are established. Thus the possibility of

performing Transformative Learning evolves gradually, usually being only sporadic up to the age of about 18 and with a more general breakthrough in the early 20s – which at the same time indicates that the period from about 18 up to the middle or late 20s is very important for what could be termed basic Transformative Learning (Illeris 2014a).

### **Youth expectations and problems in late modernity**

#### *Basic youth expectations today*

The next question to be taken up is how Transformative Learning can be involved and eventually promoted and supported in youth culture and youth education. To deal with this question it is crucial to understand some basic points about the youth situation today.

Fundamentally the youth situation has right back from the late 1960s been through a profound and radical process of cultural liberation (Ziehe and Stubenrauch 1982, Simonsen 2000, Ziehe 2009). This has resulted in some basic youth expectations and frames of reference, which are strongly supported not only by mass media and social media, but also by parents, teachers and social and educational institutions. The essence of these are that the purpose of life is to be happy, and the individual has possibilities to develop and a right to expect a happy life including exciting experiences, many friends, a cheerful community, a good and attractive appearance, a meaningful education, a satisfying and well-paid job, and an economy which allows buying whatever one feels is needed or wanted.

In everyday practice there are strong preferences of a good and including social climate with a focus on the individual and a clear educational perspective in line with personal wishes, capacities and interests – and later a job with similar qualities and possibilities of challenging activities and personal advancement.

#### *Realities and problems*

However, this ideal agenda can only be realized by a minority of the young people with the most favourable personal and social background, and the financial crisis has certainly not made this easier – but rather enlarged the gap between expectations and realities.

Nevertheless, the young people maintain their dreams and expectations and evaluate their situations, realities and possibilities in this perspectives – which inevitably and even by the most optimistic and hopeful again and again results in some feeling of dissatisfaction and insufficiency. What should be exciting and enriching seems to end up in hard work and routines and slow and dull processes. What should be cooperation and community is overtaken by competition and hierarchies. What should be open doors to self-realization and happiness is shut up in definite and limiting choices demanded by systems, tests, grading and regulations constructed to speed up the production of exams, approvals, allowances and degrees.

#### *The hard, fragile and uncertain identity process*

Under these conditions the crucial identity process assumes the nature of a navigation in a wind-swept ocean with very few lighthouses and harbours within reach. Everyday life becomes a question of survival by clinging to the few acceptable moments and small victories, neglecting the triviality and looking forward to events in which the routines are broken and there is a possibility of positive attention and experience of progress and self-expression.

To keep the course it becomes absolutely necessary to be true to oneself, directed by clear goals and commitments and at the same time ready to make and re-make choices – and this is precisely what the identity process is about: to keep the personal and self-confirmatory identity balance between stability and flexibility. The most important general learning in youth education today is probably about keeping the balance and command the navigation in complex and more or less incalculable systems and at the same time manage the competition and learning directed by invisible authorities – all of which are certainly valuable abilities for the future of today's societies.

The identity process in youth culture and youth education is comprehensive, challenging and difficult, and at the same time as all of this is managed the distant goals of success and happiness should be kept in view and even occasionally be fulfilled. No wonder that many fail or need extra time to come through – and many countries have drop-out problems and problems of insufficient learning outcome in their youth education systems.

### **The current youth situation and transformative learning**

#### *Education and identity development*

When seen in this perspective it becomes evident that youth education today is not only a question of the acquisition of prescribed knowledge, skills and understandings. All of this must be combined with the identity processes which are taking place and mentally dominating every single student, and which is crucial for the value and utility of the prescribed learning.

It is precisely in this combination and balance the question of Transformative Learning in youth is central. Students in all branches of youth education need and try to balance this combination, but the systems are in no way constructed to meet this crucial need, and most teachers and instructors only have weak understandings and feelings of what all of this is about – they master their subjects, they have eventually been through some didactical training, but they have hardly ever had the possibility to realize the overriding importance for their students of the identity process.

To initiate and support the combination of more traditional learning with the on-going identity development it is, first of all, necessary to realize how central and dominating the identity process is in the mental development of the students.

Next it is also unavoidable to examine and consider the possible mental connections between the prescribed educational content and the life situation, preferences and interests of the students in question – this is difficult, because teachers and educators are usually not acquainted with such considerations and have no specific qualifications in this connection. But nevertheless it must and can be done and successful examples of this are today rather frequently carried out and reported (at least in Denmark).

Further it is important that attention in such educational processes is given equally to the subject content and to the involved conditions, values, emotions, interests, applications, life perspectives etc. so that the learning outcome is not only knowledge and skills, but always also subjective understanding and commitment.

#### *Transformative Learning in youth education*

If these conditions are met – which is not at all so difficult as it may immediately seem, because it is unusual to think about education in such terms – we actually have to do with educational processes and activities which aim at, promote and support the possibility of Transformative Learning in youth and respecting and building on the

present youth conditions as outlined above.

It is obvious that we are far away from the dominating ways of practicing youth education – but it is also evident that these ways are strongly harassed in today's effectivity and competitiveness oriented educational approaches, for the simple reason that they in no way build on the youth situation as it is experienced by the young people of today.

Immediately Transformative Learning in youth education is about positively supporting the students' identity development at the early and insecure stages, i.e. both the personal understandings and the wider perspectives and consequences of the content learning and all the behavioural and social challenges they are confronted with both inside and outside the educational institutions. This is fundamentally to cross the boundaries of traditional limitations to the content dimensions of the subjects. There are endless possibilities to do so, and the young people are usually much more engaged in the learning when such boundary-crossing is involved.

### *The noble art of 'dreamcrushing'*

In some connections this kind of engaging and boundary-crossing endeavours may and need to assume what we have sometimes spoken about as 'the noble art of dreamcrushing'. This, of course, is a very challenging way of formulating it. But actually the contrast between the dreams or expectations and the realities of the youth situation today sometimes calls for radical changes. However, by combining our knowledge of the central position of identity development in youth with the experiences and theory of adults' Transformative Learning, an approach of this kind can be created, and by further practice it can, no doubt, also be further developed and cultivated.

Of course, the expression of dreamcrushing is both brutal and provocative – but we have chosen it to make it clear that involvement in the identity processes of the young may call for such brutality and provocations, and the life situation of the young people of today frequently makes it necessary and helpful to resort to brutal and provocative means. There are almost inevitably situations during adolescence today when it is both a necessity and a liberation in such hard ways to be brought to realize that it is impossible to fulfil some of the dreams which so many young people create in their search for a good and meaningful identity and self-realization.

Only a tiny minority of the young will be able to make a living by their achievements in sport, music, singing or entertainment, and also very few will actually come through to be a famous doctor or lawyer, journalist or philosopher, or whatever may be on the topical top-ten list of future prospects. For the great majority such dreams have to be transformed into something which is much more down-to-earth and immediately also much less exciting and lucrative.

To realize and come to terms with this demands a rather dramatic kind of what has been described as regressive and restoring Transformative Learning (Illeris 2014a) – which may immediately be painful and almost impossible: the transition from the dreams of fantasy to the realities of a job as a check-out cashier, an assistant at an old-age home, a postman, or perhaps just be unemployed or have occasional tasks of routine work.

To support young people to come through such Transformative Learning in ways so that they are able to experience and realize that a good life and a satisfactory job situation can be obtained and practiced in many different ways is certainly a substantial challenge to youth teachers, instructors and supervisors of the present competition society. Competition always creates both winners and losers, and in relation to the

dreams which are more or less enforced on the young generation there are certainly more losers than winners.

Thus dreamcrushing has become an unavoidable necessity of late modernity – and perhaps the noble art of practicing this will be the most important and widespread kind of Transformative Learning in youth and the most significant demand for those who are dealing professionally with youth education and development. Dreamcrushing shall not and must not be understood and practiced just as the smashing of dreams and expectations. It must be developed into a process of combining realistic approaches with learning and transformations in line with what is really useful and pointing forward for the young generation of today. Although we are pretty far away from the time and situation in which Mezirow launched the concept of Transformative Learning, this concept can actually be seen and used for a very much needed addition to the practices of youth learning and education today.

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**GENDER**



## Transformative Learning in a Feminist Learning Culture

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### Abstract

A difference can exist between the outcomes of adult learning sought by social movement activists and the outcomes sought by individuals marginalised and disadvantaged in contemporary society. The social movement wants to educate new activists, but such outcomes can be far from the minds of participants in women's popular education. This paper describes an ethnographic study of participants, facilitators and coordinators in a learning culture created by a women's popular education organisation in the Republic of Ireland. The study uses Bourdieu's (2001) concepts of field and habitus as a frame for identifying the type of transformative learning that has been developed in this field of practice, in order to examine it as a learning culture. The research shows the extent to which participants value the social, emotional and affective aspects of transformative learning that have resulted from the nature of the field created by the facilitators and coordinators. While the outcomes reflect the type of transformations as knowers identified by Belenky et al (1997) in *Women's Ways of Knowing*, socio-cultural learning theory (Wells and Claxton 2002) challenges the essentialisation of these stages as belonging to women only. The stages from 'Silence' to 'Received Knowing' reflect the limiting effects of oppression that both gender and class stratification has on habitus. The findings relating to these stages indicate that affective equality is essential in helping adults examine the question 'how shall I be' in a society that demands reflexivity (Giddens 1991) and in developing the capacity to make choices, but the same society fails to provide large sections of the population with the skills to do so. Affective equality (Lynch et al 2009) is also essential in enabling 'solidary work', which is at the core of the feminist popular education project.

The point about providing transformative learning opportunities like this is that the transformations are at a pre-cognitive level but the potential for future cognitive development exists when participants' ideas of themselves as knowers change. Bourdieu (2001) states that habitus cannot be changed by cognitive means. It takes a needs-based learning culture to provide this opportunity, so that further education, employment, or any other type of action becomes seen as a real possibility. Participants in this type of learning culture have the opportunity to try out a provisional habitus that serves to underpin negotiation of choices. Such choices can then enable them to proceed through the later stages of *Women's Ways of Knowing* that are characteristic of more formal forms of adult education and training. If the desired outcome of participants is to be able to move from popular education into formal education, then a change in habitus is essential in transforming women's sense of themselves as knowers.

The research also showed that the definition of success from the point of view of the organisation has been reframed: from education *for* the social movement to education *by* the social movement through the provision of a feminist learning culture.

### Introduction

This paper explores the question of 'what form transforms' through a learning culture approach, describing research on an Irish women's organisation focused on empowerment through popular education. The origins of the organisation and its

mission are described, along with the tensions and conflicts that gave rise to the reflexive question it raised. The findings of the ethnographic research project enables the organisation look to the future and have a fresh sense of how its learning culture enables transformation.

Waterford Women's Centre is an organisation founded in the mid-1990s to create a qualifications pathway for women in local communities who facilitated change through a community development process, but who were unable to gain paid employment when those community development groups obtained funding for staff. Jobs went to those with qualifications, reflecting a characteristic feature of a highly credentialised society (Drudy and Lynch 1993). A secondary aim was to educate and train such facilitators, and provide a class and gender consciousness to their work.

By the year 2000, a qualifications pathway was in place, enabling community activists gain a higher education qualification on a part-time basis in the South-East region of Ireland. The Centre had been established, and was running programmes to meet the needs of women's groups as they formed. Those years had provided staff with many examples and anecdotes telling of personal transformation yet, unless those participants move into formal educational and training programmes or employment, they do not count in official metrics, even though the type of personal transformation described by participants is life-changing.

By 2010, it was also clear that the women who came to the Centre had a different set of needs to those who were the original participants. Many women are referred by their doctors, social workers, and other local organisations, or encouraged by friends who have been participants. For many, joining a group is the first time in their adult lives where they have a chance to be treated with respect, and enabled to identify their own needs. Feminist groupwork processes are at the core of the activities and its value system, yet participants today neither identify with feminism nor express any desire to become feminist activists. Hooks states that it is reformist feminism's failure to incorporate class into the transformation agenda that has failed working-class women and resulted in women not relating to feminism (hooks 2000).

How is the organisation to frame its work today? What aspects of the work needed to be held onto in such a time of change? Describing its work as community development through community education was no longer useful, as the state providers of vocational education and training maintained ownership of the term 'community education', were identified with it, and funded for it. 'Community' is a useful amorphous, catch-all term, onto which different groups can project its own meaning. No-one, for example, disagrees with 'community' (Powell and Geoghegan 2004). But for the organisation, 'community' has always meant working-class communities, those who not have the same aspirations for, or means of access to, the same opportunities that the majority enjoy.

The Centre's origins lie in the in the struggles of 1980s' Ireland, with the motto "no crèche, no class"; its establishment came through the equality initiatives and anti-poverty programmes of the EU in the 1990s, supported by the Irish state; its ongoing funding relied on the state support of community development projects. Inglis states that the social upheaval of 1980s' Ireland resulted in women experiencing "a sense of alienation from the existing system" (Inglis 1994 p.54). Women's groups were able to emerge because of two developments: first, the consciousness-raising activities of the women's movement through the formation of self-help groups; secondly, the influence of Paulo Freire in adult education and the role of non-formal educational activities in community development. The result was the struggle for women to "gain ownership and control of their own education" (ibid).

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The current context, however, has changed. The state sees the solution to poverty as employment rather than redistribution, and there is no longer support for equality for women marginalised from mainstream society. The organisation's origins were a collective response to oppression, but today's women come as individuals. The Centre's values were founded in a decade where rapid modernisation resulted in modernist values – the belief in progress through education, for example; but it is now located in a postmodern era where often the role for adult education organisations is the creation of desire or the self-surveilling subject.

All of us need to make choices today. Failure to make choices means being blamed, whether or not adults have had the education and opportunity to make good choices, whether or not those choices are constrained by the critical factors of class, gender and race. For example, many adult women are not socially mobile, able to move to areas where employment opportunities may be better, yet this social mobility is expected, while ignoring the costs of such mobility in terms of disconnection from social networks.

Reflecting the need for adults to be reflexive, so too the organisation asked questions and used research opportunities, in this case to identify the nature and type of transformation that results in women's transformation. This would provide a means of identifying what remained of the original mission and what needed to change. The question the research set out to answer was what transformation occurred and how it occurred, using the framework of Bourdieu's (2001) concepts of field and habitus: every area of practice, such as an organisation, acts as a field, with power relations circulating within it. Fields shape our habitus, that is, the set of dispositions that give us a frame through which we make sense of the world. We come to any new experience with a frame of reference, or habitus, and any change or sense of possibility of change is interpreted from that habitus. Bourdieu also states that changing a habitus is not possible by cognitive means: this presents a challenge to the feminist project with its Freirean emphasis on awareness-raising, or conscientization (Freire 1970).

The research set out to map the field and identify its effects on habitus using Smith's idea of institutional ethnography (Smith 2005). A six-week period of fieldwork enabled me to observe, listen, ask questions while allowing business as usual to continue. The data was then considered for what it was indicating about the Centre as a field. I was looking for the meso-level causes and effects rather than the macro-level wider societal context and constraints, or the micro-level of the individual participants' needs and contexts.

The data indicated the following elements, many of which the literature regards as characteristic of women's popular education:

- New connections
- Empowerment through groupwork
- The physical space
- Challenge and support
- Pace

The themes were then expressed as hypotheses for testing in a focus group with staff, facilitators and management committee members.

These aspects of practice in the Centre have developed in response to the needs of participants. Women come to the Centre needing a social and supportive space and a sense of identity beyond ascribed gender roles. Needs are normalised, which in itself reduces a sense of isolation. The outcome is self-discovery, which enables the

relationship with the self to change. The Centre becomes a bridge to something outside of each woman's life.

Being welcomed, and being recognised, and being given a turn to speak, all are recognised by participants as contributing to their sense of empowerment. The practice in the Centre is to contradict or challenge a participant if she claims she is not capable of knowing. She is reminded of what she has already provided evidence of: her own thoughts, her own feelings, and her own experience. Belenky et al claim that “if the authority seeks out and praises the intelligence of those who hold the position of received knowledge, it may alter their whole way of seeing themselves” (Belenky et al 1997 p.15). For a woman who has had a view of herself as ‘mindless and voiceless’, these conversations break isolation but also break the perception of the woman so that it can be reconstructed: her sense of self as a knower is changing. She is ‘coming to voice’ (ibid).

That voice is used in small groups first, then in bigger groups. The experience of each woman is normalised, and problem-solving modes can be explored. This groupwork element is perceived as empowering, because of what is discussed. It is also empowering because of the way it is facilitated – “*the ‘nothing stuff’ that’s everything*”, as stated by a facilitator. The facilitators keep the space safe for these discussions, and the relationship of each member of the group to each other is minded by ‘talk lessons’ which Mercer describes as the process by which people learn to speak and listen in turn (Mercer 2002 p.151). A participant becomes a co-participant, performing differently, and enjoying the respect and recognition they receive. *Women’s Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al 1997) identified how women in stages of knowing use the metaphor of voice: the women in the Centre used the metaphor of voice and sight: being seen and being recognised as a competent person is very affirming. Memories of experiences of feeling intimidated are held at bay.

“*The Centre is like a home from home*” was stated in different ways. It is not only how the space looks, but how it feels. Facilitators mind safety within the group, and safety within the building can also be taken for granted. The space is domestic in some features, and so provides familiarity of scale and setting but in a quasi-public space. Men who are in the Centre are working for women, and participants observe this. Women are not here to support men: men are here to support women. This is a new experience for many participants, and provides a picture of what could be possible elsewhere. This is an argument for maintaining women-only spaces, or spaces that prioritise women and where men are there to support them. It counters the cultural practices that are outside the Centre. Such spaces give “women the ability to resist power relations elsewhere” (Etienne and Jackson 2011 p.235).

The practice is a mix that involves both support and challenge. Freire states that to be treated as an object rather than as a subject is oppressive. A person acts as an object when they have no view of their own capability for action (Freire 1970 p.14). Transforming that view involves ‘unlearning’ passivity and replacing it with activity, or action on the world. Taking action involves overcoming the fear of change: to do this requires other people to remind the person that they have ability, that others have confidence in this ability, and that they will be supported in any steps they take. Their worldview is challenged. Their fear is examined. Any step taken can then be experienced as a step away from psychic imprisonment towards the energy and creativity that comes from being an active subject in the world. This is a shift in habitus because it is happening at the subjective level.

Support is also available in terms of the time each woman needs to be in the Centre. Formal development programmes are usually funded for a specific period of time,

after which a participant is expected to be ready to 'progress'. The current dominance of labour market activation measures means that it is difficult to justify to funders that some women need more, rather than less, time before they are ready to take any additional step. It is important that a woman who has low levels of self-confidence feels that she can control important elements such as pace.

Equality of recognition is another element in transformative practices, and is extended to not just recognition, but caring for others in the form of listening, and providing appropriate supports. This care-full model provides 'nurturing capital' (Lynch et al 2009) for as long as is necessary, and the need to provide this and sustain it takes time. Time, in this sense, is another resource, another tool in the pack, to be used and appropriated as each participant needs. It takes time to practice a new way of being, to re-write one's biography, and practice a newer way of performing, acting as a subject, and expecting to be treated as an equal. Alheit and Dausien, examining learning processes within transitions, refer to this process as 'biographicity', the project of redesigning or repositioning the self within specific contexts, but it depends on perceiving these contexts as shapeable (Alheit and Dausien 2007 p.66). Some contexts provide resources and perceptions that allow it; others constrain it. This context provides the resource of time. Time enables praxis: it is not just abstract knowledge that is handed over, it is reflecting on experience, discussing different problems, exploring solutions, and testing things out. It is also performing differently, and managing how that feels. A primary habitus is kept in abeyance for this period, and a provisional one is being tested out. The length of time for a provisional habitus to take hold and become permanent has to vary from person to person. It takes time for a participant to become visible to others in a new way, but also to herself. "*I was invisible. I think that's changing now.*"

Another aspect that became significant during the fieldwork stage was the emotional sphere in the discourse of the participants. I noted that women had been speaking frequently in terms of 'feelings' and 'feeling better'. Ledwith and Springett (2010) claim that an increased sense of well-being should be an outcome of participatory community work. 'Feeling better' might be an implicit outcome that relates to an increase in a sense of agency and levels of confidence. If working-class women are inscribed with power relations comprising their primary habitus, and they learn to use power creatively and productively in a provisional habitus, then that makes them feel better. It is not, as one might think, the result of a therapeutic or counselling approach that might herald a very individualising and therefore domesticating outcome: it comes from their social development, making new relationships, and no longer feeling invisible. Dominant discourses in lifelong learning have long held that feelings and emotions are separate and should be kept separate: that education is about one and if the other, emotion, is involved, it is not education because it is not about the rational. "The neglect of the affective domain in education is a profoundly gendered matter" (Baker et al 2004 p.166).

Feelings are not perceived as 'anti-rational' in the Centre: they are part and parcel of women's experiences, and reflect the epistemological stages of participants. They do not have to be the rational 'responsible learner' demanded by higher education and dominating the lifelong learning discourse (Warren and Webb 2007). Informal education and a feminist nonprofit organisation provide the space where those ways of knowing are accepted. Discussion leads to cognitive development, not the other way around, according to Mercer (2002). While Mercer's examination of the role of intellectual development through collective discussion is focused on schoolchildren, it might be just as valid for adults.

Freire (1970) describes the work of *conscientization* as beginning with ‘unlearning’: identifying the theories and concepts that have been unexamined that are oppressive and replacing them with more valid or useful ones. This is a cognitive process with the view of the self as a knower being fundamental to the ability to acquire new knowledge or even make new relationships. The deep-rooted habits of mind that have been inscribed on the person can serve to limit them, especially in their view of their capability as a knower or learner. Working-class women, for example, have been ‘colonised’ by interiorising the ideas of wider society (Freire 1970). When the woman sees herself as capable as receiving knowledge, she is still dependent on knowledge to be given to her. It requires a move from the early stages of Silence and Received Knowledge to the next stage in Belenky et al’s typology of *Women’s Ways of Knowing* before she can see the agency she actually possesses but may not use consciously. This stage is Subjective Knowledge (Belenky et al 1997 p.15), where the woman’s experience can be reviewed, the learning identified, but it is personal and private to her, and subjectively expressed. They are *her* truths. Knowledge comes from inside her, not from outside. She can contradict received wisdom. Belenky et al describe this as ‘a major developmental transition’ (ibid p.54). Women who have experienced the silencing of the self as children, “if they listen at all to others, it is to those who are most like themselves in terms of life experiences” (ibid p.68). This stage is ‘antirationalist’ (ibid p.71). The gut is more trusted than logic.

English’s research of feminist organisations finds that that they are ‘informal colleges’, where women use such facilities to find a pathway, or a way of ‘learning to be’ (English 2011). Such places need to embody a culture with which women with low levels of social capital can identify. The type of woman who is attracted to the Centre is one who knows some kind of development is on offer, but she does not feel competent enough to use more formal pathways, or does not relate to formal routes for some reason. Bourdieu and Passeron’s (2000) idea of habitus is that every person already has one, and it forms the basis of orientation for any new experience. The person, through these interactions, affects the habitus of the new culture in turn.

Sociocultural theories of learning recognise the role of feelings and emotions in any process of development. First of all, self-awareness of what one is feeling or thinking is an element, and then the amount of reliability or validity that is placed on such reactions is next. These could represent profound shifts in habits of being or habitus. They break the pattern, the conditioning of accepting received wisdom, and of seeing oneself without any capability in terms of knowing and learning. The woman can suspend accepting the dictates of the people she had previously been involved with: her parents, teachers, neighbours, siblings, peers, state agents. She can ask herself: How do I feel about this? What do I think? She starts using “I” in a new way, for a new purpose. There is a change in her relationship to structures. It is both a cognitive and emotional process, experienced subjectively. It is also a relational process, where awareness is raised with others, and where connection with others is valued. The social relations that are formed are at the core of the transformation process at this point. Sociocultural theories of learning such as Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) provide a focus on integrated systems of learning - a learning culture, in other words. CHAT links teaching and learning and places it in a wider social and cultural context.

Bourdieu and Passeron (2000) identify the role of habitus in cultural reproduction and cultural transformation. Each woman, as an agent, is included in the culture of the Centre. The practices of the Centre reflect her needs as well as the tools developed in



the activities of women's community education. Her voice is part of what establishes the learning culture. If she did not have this voice, then the culture would reflect the habitus of the staff and founder members, whose needs may not be the same as the needs of the women who come to the Centre today. Being needs-based and participatory ensures that the responsive nature of the culture is maintained rather than atrophying. As the woman sees her peers having an impact on the culture by her needs being met, she also sees her own power in the culture. Power, as identified by English (2011) can be productive: and the more she uses productive power, the less power coercive relations have on her, the more she transforms the culture in the Centre, and maybe, elsewhere. But it is in the Centre where the 'discourse of ability' (Wells and Claxton 2002) says that she has voice, intelligence and agency.

The Centre's facilitators are aware of the emotional nature of this process, that the habitus of a participant forms part of her, and that asking her to unlearn it is presenting her with a difficult task. But they also recognise that a large part of their work is 'the nothing stuff' that is vital. It is the quality of the relationships between the facilitators and the groups and the relationships that the participants make with each other which is at the core of the transformation process. As members of staff facilitate participants to be reflexive, so the Centre facilitates staff to be reflexive.

For the facilitators and staff, the space itself is a political act. They do not direct what participants will do, but they challenge participants to think well of themselves and of others, by relating their stories and connecting them to the structures that pre-exist them. Facilitators are not using the term 'agency' and 'structure' but they reflect an awareness of the impact of structures on women generally, and working-class women in particular. Ensuring that resources of time and 'tools' are brought to women who are marginalised is also seen as a political act. Feminist groupwork practice depends on seeing structure in agency (Warren and Webb 2007), seeing the political in the personal.

The responsive nature of informal education groups, the practice of supporting participants to become more active on sub-groups, the personal development and social analysis of the facilitators' perspective, all contribute to a more productive circulation of power that contradicts a more oppressive or coercive circulation of power, as described by English (2011) in her study of feminist non-profit organisations that have a political agenda. A democratic and inclusive space for women is a productive exercise of power when good relations between all who are in the Centre are observed and learned by all; discursive power circulates within the groups when the personal is related to the political (ibid p.220). The Centre can be described as a 'third space' where people with an identity that is not valued in the public sphere can create alternative discourses that reflect their values and needs (Mirza 2006 p.149).

The Centre's learning culture works with needs: some of these needs relate to a human desire for social interaction, for making friends and overcoming social isolation. Some needs relate to having feelings affirmed rather than denied. It does not essentialise these aspects as belonging only to women or characteristic of all women. It does not deny the emotional or affective in favour of cognitive ways of learning. Feminist groupwork practice has been built on human needs and human desires, and it works because of its roots in those. Women's community education is a grassroots response to these needs, and frames the meeting of these needs as an educational activity.

This research showed me the extent to which the emotional and social has become separated from what is regarded as education and the extent to which formal

education has moved away from incorporating these essentially human needs, or misrecognising them. Baker et al point to the neglect of Bloom's ideas about how emotional development is also an educational activity (Baker et al 2004 p.167). It is interesting that theories about emotional or affective aspects of development are taken up by radical feminist educators as reflected in community development writings (see Burke and Jackson 2007, Ledwith 2005). It is also interesting to note that many contemporary sociocultural educational theorists are working with the social or relational aspects of learning.

The social, however, is not collective in the sense that collective action for social change results. I recognise that the hope of the ability to work collectively for social change is a modernist concept characteristic of a social movement activist. However, in relation to a learning culture, the social may be an important element in establishing the capability to work collectively. The possibility for collective action then exists.

This is what I see in the Centre, an informal pathway that works with women's values and desires, including the desire to hold onto valued family ties, or change oppressive ones. It brings to mind the 'care-full' model of citizenship (Lynch and Lyons 2008 p.180), that there are times when we all need care, there are times when we provide care. No-one can get through life without a relationship to care. The struggle such centres are involved in is that women need to be affirmed as private and public beings; that care roles are not private concerns but aspects of citizenship, and should be recognised as such. Women's community education is a mediating space for that struggle.

If the Centre is truly a 'third space' (Mirza 2006), then the coercive discourses of wider society can be held at bay or at the very least, contradicted by being replaced with a discourse of ability and possibility. The exclusive practices of other educational institutions such as schools are not allowed. Uniformity means having the same identity as every other person in the place, a woman, but working with the different experiences that each woman brings. Productive aspects of power can be extended. Engeström (2009), using an activity theory approach, claims that an entire activity system produces culturally new patterns of activity. Women are separated from the social and economic roles they are normally identified with and identify with, and produce a new, alternative, culture with distinct patterns of activity.

The radical feminist movement sees women's experiences of marginalisation and poverty as the basis for understanding experiences as politically and socially determined and therefore potentially changeable. Women's community education may not be characteristic of second-wave feminist action, but English would describe it as a contemporary 'postheroic' and strategic form of feminist activism by those who face greater risks in society (English 2011 p.218). What we demand of our participants in this form of challenge, we must demand of ourselves as a provider so that practice is congruent. There is a coherency between practice at the meso, institutional level and the practice at the micro, individual level. This coherency is maintained and needs to be maintained. Once women's community education starts being *for* rather than *with* particular groups of women, it will lose this coherency. The only liberatory space will be within the classroom, and will not be between the individual and the overall learning culture. The opportunity to act differently, in a new performativity and biographicity, will be limited.

Sociocultural learning theories such as CHAT (Wells and Claxton 2002) counter the criticisms that *Women's Ways of Knowing* essentialise learning processes. However, such preferences for dialogic ways of knowing may be perceived because of essentialism as backward or not-modern enough as they reflect characteristics

attributed to traditional groups, perhaps, or oral culture, and women. CHAT reframes the role of the social and emotional aspects as learning, not as 'private, domestic concerns' (Arnot 2006 p.134). I still do not know whether the desire for collective and connected approaches and ways of knowing are essentially feminine. I doubt it: I think the subjugation of women's ways of knowing, however, is due to the universalising of male attributes and a neo-liberal ideology of individualism and competition that reflects this. CHAT brings a feminine but subjugated approach into the realm of 'respectable' and public theory, i.e. not essentialised. I can hear the criticisms of sociocultural approaches to learning: that it's too slow, or that it deemphasises taught knowledge (Ecclestone and Hayes 2009). Yet when a group has these skills, they, and the individuals within the group, can become 'responsible learners' (Warren and Webb 2007), but do it their way. There is no 'my way', there's 'our way', as long as it is about speaking truth, and enabling multiple and diverse truths to be spoken.

The most radical thing about this form of education is its practice of responding to needs by reading behaviour, reading silences, testing responses, in a positive reflective cycle, and as a result producing a dynamic culture to counter oppressive cultural relations in wider society. Women reframe their self-concept because of feminist groupwork; to hold a new self-concept requires the maintenance of some kind of affirming bonding group. Working-class women cope with both material disadvantage and symbolic disadvantage. Women's community education provides 'recognition' first (Arnot 2006 p.134). The struggle for redistribution of material resources comes next.

Belenky et al stated that their work on *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1997) identified the different epistemological stages and the different views of women of themselves as knowers and their relation to knowledge-making. They did not explore how women move from one stage of knowing to the next, but they regard this as important (Belenky et al 1997 p.15). The case study of the Centre, and the relational and emotional aspects that are at the core of the process, show how habitus starts to change. Primary habitus is respected and from that new ways of being in the world can be practised. These new ways of being are not cognitive-only processes: they are affective and psychomotor in that they are emotional and activity-based. They enable a shift in the woman's self-concept, but also a shift in the way of relating to other people, being recognised, and being heard as an equal. This is nurturing capital that enables other-centred work, enabling a shift in habitus to being able to work in solidary relations (Lynch et al 2009). The fact that arrangements are made to suit each participant makes each woman important: in turn, their voicing of their needs forms the culture of the Centre. Transformation occurs, but where that transformation is applied is not determined by the Centre.

This study of a feminist learning culture shows both what kind of culture women will construct and the tools and resources that will as a result be made available that in turn enable women's move from the Silent stage of knowing to Received Knowledge and on to Subjective Knowledge (Belenky et al 1997). This also addresses the gap in the women's learning literature noted by English (2011) that relates to the undeveloped dimensions of learning. Bourdieu's (2001) call for a dispositional theory of practice, when applied to a learning culture shows that transformative or critical pedagogy can extend beyond the classroom. The Centre is a case study of the layers of interactions and relationships that are created when women themselves have a chance to organise it for themselves, as in the 'informal colleges' studied by Belenky et al (1997).

Should the organisation now give up the social change objective of community education? The study has helped reshape the creation of such learning spaces as political activities based on resistance to dominant and oppressive discourses. This research recognises the Centre as a learning culture, as a community of practice that is informed by radical and critical educational theories, but whose culture is formed and reformed around each woman, whether she is participating peripherally or deeply. This is not to valorise the Centre's culture but is a call to recognise the role of meso-level 'third spaces' (Mirza 2006) in countering the symbolic violence of the wider culture by providing nurturing capital that is a private form of social capital. Working-class women are recognised and affirmed as competent, and their self-doubts are challenged by its 'discourse of ability' (Claxton 2002) for a particular group that emphasises agency and where a primary habitus is not problematic but is the basis for learning from experience. The totality of a learning culture encompasses four types of change identified by Wenger that a community of practice can provide: change in identity, change in a sense of belonging, learning as doing, and meaning that comes from experience (Wenger 2009 p.211). If the habitus and ways of knowing of participants change through the consciousness-raising and related activities in women's community education, then the field is achieving Bourdieu's idea of cultural or social transformation, changing the "social conditions of the production of dispositions", at least in the transitional environment (Bourdieu 2001 p.41). The idea of studying a learning culture and its effects has enabled education and learning to be reconnected: education has become the remit of educators and is about what they do, the curricula they develop, and their professional identity; learning puts the focus on learners and de-emphasizes the structural constraints and discourses that influence who can learn and what can be learned. Studying the Centre as a learning culture is the means of linking both. It gives us more understanding of 'what form transforms'.

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## **Women Adult Educators in Greece: Professional identity and current challenges at time of crisis**

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### **Abstract**

Current research suggests that adult trainers should understand gender specific needs as part of a personal learning and developmental process. This study concluded that trainees have certain stereotypes in relation to the profile of the adult trainer. The paper suggests training trainers on critical reflections in relation to gender stereotypes.

### **Introduction**

Gender discrimination in higher education amongst faculty and students has been addressed in several US mainly based studies over the past 40 years. The phenomenon is attributed by certain researchers (Easterly & Ricard, 2011) to unconscious bias or gender schemas where the possible solutions can also be found in order to increase participation of female faculty in institutions of higher education. Most studies, however, mainly concentrate on access to decision making managerial posts or to faculty development and professorships rather than to discriminations experienced due to gender differences in the classroom setting.

Several studies argue that despite effort for transformation, women have not given yet equal opportunities for academic careers (Touchton, 2008) due to hidden assumptions and unconscious gender bias (Towers, 2008). Furthermore, the issue of climate in organizations, that is the commonly held assumptions, beliefs and attitudes, is significant in gender equity in the context of higher education. Assumptions serve to shape and constrain the range of possible solutions to the problem of inequity (Allan, 2011). Gender stereotypes are embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches that systemically reproduce male power and shape how people perceive, conceive, and discuss social reality in generation after generation. Women have also their own biases and assumptions, believing that their work is valued less than men's and that there are more constraints because of home responsibilities that limit career advancement and fragment career growth. West & Curtis, (2006) would argue that the limited women's participation reflects a lack of balance between family and career pressures. Valian (2005) also suggests that gender differences are reflecting an acculturation problem.

Unconscious bias occurs in every part of life and almost in all parts of the world including certainly Greece. However, given the growing number of women in professional life and academia, it comes as an unexpected finding that sex and gender stereotypes (Babcock & Laschever, 2007) still exist.

Houston, Meyer & Paewai (2006) address the complexity of gender bias in knowledge creation and knowledge transmission through research and teaching in academia as Romainville (1996) noted a decade back. Women, who work within administration in higher education, face many struggles since higher education has traditionally been a hierarchical and patriarchal system that makes it more difficult for women to advance and contribute to the marginalization of women in leadership roles.

The limited progress of women is documented in several studies from US to China. Women are strictly controlled and university governance, management and leadership are predominantly occupied by men. A Portuguese study suggests that higher

education institutions reproduce the same inequalities in career structures that are dominant in other occupational spheres with the use of informal procedures emerging as an obstacle for women entrance into academic careers (Carvalho & Santiago, 2010). According to authors universities and especially managerial positions are culturally embedded by masculinity and reflect traditional notions of femininity and masculinity with significant implications for women's participation in top management in HE institutions. A similar qualitative study in China concluded that Chinese women faculty as other international studies suggest are working double time but continue to play a limited role in critical personnel decisions influencing academic promotions and advancement (Rhoads & Gu, 2012). Another qualitative study with a critical feminist framework, concludes that women faculty experience overall negative institutional and departmental environments and slow rates of promotion (Gardner, 2012). Therefore, the above data suggests that gender difference and gender bias is still present in the daily life of several academic institutions. Some (Stout, Staiger, & Jennings, 2007) would suggest that training faculty, chairs, deans, and administration that unconscious gender bias exists may be one of the most effective methods of ending it.

The current study would argue that prior to change the bias of others is significant to understand your own bias, assumptions and beliefs in relation to professional roles, disorienting dilemmas and possible courses of action. Jack Mezirow argued that a habit of mind based on assumptions that act as a filter for our experiences (moral consciousness, social norms, learning styles, philosophies including religion, world view, etc., our artistic tastes and personality type and preferences) (Mezirow, 2000: 17 & 18) is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior. He considers educators as able to engage in the kind of metacognition that is required to question the premises of beliefs and perspectives and he has stated that transformation include “maturity, education, [italics added] safety, health, economic security, and emotional intelligence” (Mezirow, 2000:15).

Mezirow based his theory on a qualitative study of U.S. women returning to higher education or the workplace after several years of absence. Mezirow's original study (1978a, 1978b) concluded women returning to education went through a “personal transformation”. On a later development of his theory, Mezirow (1998b) argued that critical reflection of assumptions involves subjective reframing, an understanding of the causes of the assumption, that can include one of four self-reflection forms: narrative, systemic, therapeutic, and epistemic. From all the above forms, this paper is concerned with systemic critical self-reflection on the taken-for-granted cultural influences, which might be organizational (e.g., workplace) or moral-ethical (e.g., social norms) and which often place obstacles in the professional development of women adult educators with the relative results on hindering development of awareness of gender stereotypes in training adults.

Literature in the field of transformative learning has focused on several aspects of the possible transformation of women. Age and its effects on the self-image is developed by Armacost (2005) who writes on menopause and its transformative dimensions, and Kluge (2007) stresses out that women are challenged to undertake physical activity as a means of challenging stereotypes of aging. Barnacle (2009) and Michelson (1998) have show the role of the self-image in women's learning and emphasized non-cognitive modes of knowing, which recalls Ryan's (2001) contention that learning is based on individual self-reflection. Through the examining of the self-image and their physical boundaries women learn their potential and are transformed in self-

perception, moving from stereotypes and negative self image to “increased connection with and confidence in their bodies” (Kluge, 2007: 187).

Freire (1970) underlined that emotion is a catalyst in transforming one's life circumstances. Much of the transformative learning literature on women focuses on emotional conditions, which affect women's learning. These conditions directly and indirectly affect women's transformation either by stymieing it or by serving as a catalyst. It would seem that women, who work, face or survived a crisis and went on through difficult circumstances, have an extra ability to be transformed. Hamp (2007) identifies the “drama and extreme emotional distress” (p.176) that is part of women's learning. Muhammad and Dixson (2005) focused on specific emotions, like resistance and anger, latent pain, and discomfort among white and black women as they discussed race and gender and Mejuini (2009) considers the role of emotions in female academics' transformative learning as significant. All this data suggests that emotion plays a particular role in transformation for women, even though in many studies it remains beneath the surface and is not named directly.

On the contrary, in many relevant studies, a lot of importance is paid to the importance of relationships in women's transformative experiences (see Brookfield, 2003; Buck, 2009; Grant, 2008; Hamp, 2007; Wittman et al., 2008). This connects to Brooks' (2000) notion that the opportunity for women to share their life narratives is at the heart of their transformative experience. Cooley (2007) explores the significance of an enclave or gathering for women, which can facilitate friendship, trust, and transformative learning. Mejuini (2009) speaks to the value of collaboration and support for transformative learning among women in academe in Nigeria.

A resulting point of view is the complex of feelings, beliefs, judgments, and attitudes regarding specific women. Most of the above studies suggest that ethnocentrism continues to be present even in higher academic institutions and exhibits itself in the form of unconscious bias. John Dirkx and Patricia Cranton have researched the unconscious on our individual meaning-making including what Jung considers as the "unconscious functions." Jung ([1921]1971: 448) focused on individuation as the process by which individuals differentiate themselves from the general, collective society. It involves becoming aware of and considering the collective unconscious. People come to see how they are both the same as and different from others. When we participate in life consciously and imaginatively, we develop a deepened sense of self and an expansion of consciousness. Thus, transformation relies on the emergence of the Self, which is the very essence of the development of authenticity (Cranton, 2007a). Academic educators should be able to act authentically by distinguishing their beliefs about themselves from the common rhetoric. This process is transformative, since it is a reconstruction of the frame of reference related to the self and teaching. Cranton (2007a) concluded that since transformative learning theory and Jung's concept of individuation describe people as moving from unconsciousness to consciousness, from unquestioned formulations to complex, integrated, and ambiguous understandings of the world, the individual becomes more aware of who he or she is as apart from the collective, uncritically assimilated whole of well known, accepted ideas, notion and stereotypes and she demonstrated that these processes are evident in university educators, who tend to become authentic in their practice. Moore et al, (2007) suggest that adult educators must engage in a secondary viewing of what we already know and believe and they challenge adult educators to incorporate innovative practices of the field to increase their autonomous components.



We can conclude that gender roles are considered a main factor shaping the experiences of individuals, and in particular women's roles. Gender, a socially-constructed phenomenon, shapes people's experiences in every culture, and it certainly affects the transformative process of women educators. Freire's education for critical consciousness offers principles that can be used to help women to identify the factors in the social/economic/ political environment that limit their growth and development, to see the connection of those limits to their oppression, and hence to motivate them to act against personal and institutional sexism. Following this process of raising awareness of academics in order to be able to recognize and understand these phenomena on their personal sphere, the present study focuses on women's adult educators in a Greek Academic institution understanding of unconscious functions with the use of free association.

### **The current study**

The current study focuses on women's adult educators in a Greek Academic institution understanding of unconscious functions in relation to their role with the use of free association. For this purpose 14 women, all experienced adult educators working in academia, were approached with the purpose to 'talk' about their role as adult educators. Free association was used through a single question, pilot tested before given to participants in this study. Respondents were asked to disclose their own 'truth' at their own time and space (Atkinson, 1998).

Participants received a research question and briefing for the purposes of the study at their personal e-mail address. No information was disclosed in relation to other participants' identity. Participants were given one month to respond in writing. The question was the following: 'Describe, as freely as you can, your professional work and experience as woman adult educator'.

Therefore the first aim for researchers was to explore whether women would actually refer specifically to that dimension of their role and then to understand the types of references they make. This method requires a minimum level of trust between researchers and respondents. Researchers had a long lasting professional relationship with most respondents and this is very likely to have influenced the level of exposure and the interpretations made by researchers as they themselves are adult educators in the same academic institution.

Content Analysis was used for understanding participant's responses to the question. Content analysis is considered appropriate for "decoding and interpreting written data and especially personal beliefs, attitudes, assumptions and perspectives" (Verma & Mallick, 2004: 224).

### **Content Analysis - Results**

Content analysis revealed that through a single question and free association, women adult educators were able to identify a number of discrimination issues in relation to their gender. The issues that arose are very relevant to other international studies findings and they can be classified in at least four categories:

- a) Assumptions and Bias of others
- b) Real Circumstances - Obstacles
- c) Assumption and bias of one-self
- d) Denial

## A. Assumptions & Bias of Others

Content analysis revealed that most women adult educators experienced discrimination in relation to gender which they explain on the basis of bias and assumptions of others (mainly men trainees) concerning the female identity. Characteristically they say:

«...the first few years I was frustrated from the attitude of men trainees who could not 'accept' me...I was trying to break their resistance, to prove that even though I am a woman they can trust me as adult educator. However I was not feeling the same for the women trainees, even though they might have been hard and competitive...I didn't feel the need to change their attitude'

«...the first few years I was upset with the looks that men trainees were giving me...I could see that they did not trust me...some of them were trying to flirt with me...it was just a way to pose their question – how come you are the trainer and I am the trainee - I had the same attitudes expressed from older women adult educators...some of them thought that I gained this job not because I deserve it but because I had friends in higher administration...”

### Being Patronized

Women adult educators also suggest that they are often confronted with completion and suspicion from others as a result of their gender and that male trainees often try to patronize them.

«...adult trainees do not accept me so easily. They always try to test me. They were always trying to prove that their professional roles were much more important than their assignment ...they always challenged their marks and wanted explanations ...»

«...I have often become the object of confrontation and competition.... I can always see suspicion in questioning what I know from adult education, despite my 20 years of professional work, am I more able to do this job...»

«...Some had a very competitive attitude I think because I am a woman...when I was asking them not to smoke in the corridor they would reply....'we have a woman at home to moan all day...and now we have another one here.....' often they were trying to impose their opinion especially on politics, social issues, immigration etc. and they resisted with passion when I was asking them to reflect critically on their assumptions»

“...A man around 55-60 came into my office and asked to see the director...when I replied that I was the director he became upset and said...I am not going to register in a school where the director is a woman...”

### False identity

Women adult educators often report that they are accepted by male trainees only when men trainees attribute to them male characteristics but also when women try to confront them in 'womanhood'.

«...but you are not a woman, you are a man ...»

«... women trainees who are more dynamic and competitive are always distant, suspicious and critical...I feel that somehow there is a

subconscious attitude that says...I am dominating as a female here and no one else...»

Others believe that discrimination is obvious in the preferences that trainees have in relation to the gender of the adult educator. Characteristically they say:

«...I believe that when women are more than men in a classroom they feel much better when the trainer is also a woman rather than a man, they feel that they can be more open to discussion...»

«...I think that they like it more that I am a woman, they believe that women are more flexible, they give better grades, are more supportive and less competitive than a man who frightens them a little bit ...»

### **B) Real Circumstances – Obstacles**

However, there are some women adult educators who refer to gender discrimination mainly exhibited in familial and social pressures to abandon their professional life. Some women adult educators confront and resist these pressures and others feel guilty and inadequate to cope with the different roles.

«...I was very interested in adult education and I chose this field consciously but many of my friends criticized me saying...why do you need this now, you are going to create more problems to yourself, you don't have the time to do this etc...I think it was the best choice I ever made...»

«...not really the trainees but the professionals, men adult educators criticized my ability to cope with various roles being a wife, a mother, an adult educator and they would certainly prefer to see me go back home because in this way they could prove the value of their role...»

«...I had a lot of pressure working full time, being pregnant, trying to cope with house chores...but I really liked being an adult educator...despite all obstacles I was passionate for this job and worked more and more...the pressure was incredible...I was trying to be perfect in everything...I was feeling guilty all the time especially about children and family but now I have started finding a balance...I don't feel guilty any more ...»

### **C) Assumptions and Bias of One-Self**

Women adult educators also confront their own attitudes and assumptions in relation to their own gender and this becomes obvious when they try to act as 'mothers' for their students. It is worth to note what they are saying:

«Sometimes I think that I am using my female social skills even consciously in order to protect and support them, I act as a mother, maybe I am overprotective and I think this has to do with my gender...».

«...I worked with women trainees and I feel that I helped many of them to transform their assumptions by disclosing my own experiences in education...»

### **D) Denial**

Finally there is a group of women adult educators who think that their gender was never an obstacle in their professional life or in the classroom. Is this denial or a fact?

«...As a female adult educator I have never experienced prejudice because of my gender, never not even at the least...».

«...I never experienced any prejudice because of my gender...it is maybe my experience or my age...»

«...from my experience my gender was never a problem in my relationship with my students...»

### **Conclusion**

Gender discrimination in higher education is attributed to unconscious bias (Easterly & Ricard, 2011) and hidden assumptions (Towers, 2008). Assumptions (Allan, 2011) are embedded in cultural discourses, social institutions, and individual psyches that systemically reproduce male power and shape how people perceive, conceive, and discuss social reality in generation after generation. Women have also their own biases and assumptions but they also face certain constraints because of home responsibilities (West & Curtis, 2006) that reflect a lack of balance between family and career pressures.

Unconscious bias is certainly present in the current qualitative study and the results are similar to those of other studies carried out in different parts of the world, from US to Portugal and China (Williams, 2004; Carvalho & Santiago, 2010; Rhoads & Gu, 2012; Gardner, 2012; Kelly & Fetridge, 2012). Ethnocentrism as Mezirow (2000:17 & 18) would define it, seems to be an issue revealed from the responses of participants in the current study.

Most academic educators, who took part in this study, following a transformative path, seem to wonder about their bias but mostly on their role among men trainees and colleagues, trying to distinguish their beliefs about themselves from the common rhetoric as Cranton (2007b) recommended. We consider this process a transformation, since it is a reconstruction of the frame of reference related to the self and teaching, in the framework of Jung's concept of individuation who described it as moving from unconsciousness to consciousness, unquestioned formulations to complex, integrated, and ambiguous understandings of the world. Indeed, the educators in this study tend to become more aware of who they are and how they respond to challenges and needs of their role, apart from the uncritically, accepted ideas, notions and stereotypes.

We know from relevant studies, the importance of relationships in women's transformative experiences (see Brookfield, 2003; Buck, 2009; Grant, 2008; Hamp, 2007; Wittman et al., 2008) and that women share their life narratives as part of their transformative experience (Brooks, 2000). The importance of relationships and emotions are also present in the way the women educators in our research experience their role, a finding which agrees with Mejuini (2009) who considers significant the role of emotion in female academics' transformative learning. It would seem that Greek women educators who these last years work in a country hit by an economic crisis, tend to successfully face the obstacles deriving from their double role in home and work through their ability to move on from familial and social pressures and feelings of guilt and inadequacy to a successful career as academics.

Following Mezirow's notion that critical reflection of assumptions involves subjective reframing, we can conclude that a major understanding of the causes of the assumption of self-reflection focuses on the systemic critical self-reflection on the taken-for-granted cultural influences. In some cases the causes might be organizational (e.g., workplace) or moral-ethical (e.g., social/ familiar norms) and these obstacles probably affect the professional development of women adult educators with the relative results on hindering development of awareness of gender stereotypes in training adults, thus explaining the denial that surprisingly appeared as a finding in this study.

The current study therefore in accordance with Stout, Staiger, & Jennings (2007)

recommendations would also argue that training in order to raise awareness in relation to gender bias and discrimination is significant. As Mezirow (2000) would probably argue to understand your own bias, assumptions and beliefs in relation to professional roles, disorienting dilemmas and possible courses of action and to make a conscious effort to overcome them will benefit women adult educators and the institutions at which they work. When everyone working in the academic research community is conscious of these concerns, it will become a welcoming place for both women and men (Bingham & Nix, 2010) but furthermore for the adult trainees and their own learning experiences.

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## Male and Female Adult Educators: Critical re-thinking on differences and similarities

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**Theoretical frame:** On the basis of the number of growing research in relation to gender stereotypes and other gender related issues in adult education the current workshop wishes to explore experiences of male and female adult educators and how they can be transformed to a more bias free understanding of their role. Adult education managerial posts according to some (Hugo, 1990; Thomson & Shield, 1996, Stalker, 1996) are male dominated. Therefore female leaders have relatively low representation especially in higher education. Modern environment calls for further women participation in all spheres of life. Therefore gender differences should be taken into account in order to understand and include gender specific needs and expectations in educational practices (Avenel & Fontanini, 2009). Kitchenham (2008) argues that Mezirow based his theory on a qualitative study of U.S. women returning to higher education or the workplace after several years of absence. Mezirow's original study (1978a, 1978b) concluded women returning to education went through a 'personal transformation'. On a later development of his theory, Mezirow (1998b) argued that critical reflection of assumptions involves *subjective reframing*, an understanding of the causes of the assumption, that can include one of four self-reflection forms: narrative, systemic, therapeutic, and epistemic. From all the above forms, this workshop is concerned with *systemic critical self-reflection* on the taken-for-granted cultural influences, which might be organizational (e.g., workplace) or moral-ethical (e.g., social norms) and which often place obstacles in the professional development of women adult educators with the relative results on hindering development of awareness of gender stereotypes in training adults.

Agreeing that transformative learning is a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated, as Mezirow, (2000) stressed out, theoretical literature in the field of transformative learning have paid attention to women's experiences and personal ends in relation of transformative learning and how creativity link gender to learning. Additionally, storytelling and art become important component in transformative experiences and art can be an important component in transformative experiences. Thus, the role of creativity and the arts in supporting transformation for women has earned a special place in the literature. Buck (2009) looks at the use of photography to understand women's midlife spirituality and its connection to the transformation of women. Armacost (2005), Elvy (2004), Clover (2006), and Wittman et al. (2008), through photographic research methods examined women's transformative learning. Others, like Brooks (2000) have examined the role of the narrative arts of storytelling as important to women's learning. Wiessner (2009) examines women's use of music-based activities and Wittman et al. (2008) the use of collective writing as a means of facilitating women's transformation. Grace & Wells (2007) in their research indicated that arts-based educational strategies have significant utility in helping individuals engage in social learning and trainees link artistic expression and representations to what it means to be a proactive leader who advocates for self and others in a spectral community marked by an array of sex,

sexual, and gender differences. Moore et al, (2007) challenge adult educators to incorporate innovative practices in their teaching strategies to increase their students' autonomous components. Pettit (2010) provides a helpful example of how to use creativity to analyze power and emotion. Emotions and the way they are linked to transformation are considered important for women in the field of transformative learning. Freire (1970) underlined that emotion is a catalyst in transforming one's life circumstances. Much of the transformative learning literature on women focuses on emotional conditions, which affect women's learning. These conditions directly and indirectly affect women's transformation either by stymieing it or by serving as a catalyst. It would seem that women who work, face or survived a crisis and went on through difficult circumstances, have an extra ability to be transformed. Hamp (2007) identifies the "drama and extreme emotional distress" (p.176) that is part of women's learning. Muhammad and Dixson (2005) focused on specific emotions, like resistance and anger, latent pain, and discomfort among white and black women as they discussed race and gender and Mejuini (2009) considers the role of emotions in female academics' transformative learning as significant. All this data suggests that emotion plays a particular role in transformation for women, even though in many studies it remains beneath the surface and is not named directly.

In the process of raising awareness and training academics in order to be able to recognize and understand these phenomena, the present workshop focuses on women's adult educators in a Greek Academic institution understanding of *unconscious functions* with the use of *Education through art*, an approach based on the principal that a significant work of art might turn into an aesthetic experience, which helps adults to deepen their understanding of pre-existing knowledge and assumptions and even further help them increase their awareness of these. An *aesthetic experience* may expand trainees' perspectives by approaching deeper processes and revealing phenomena through critical reflections and exposure of emotional dimensions of learning. In this way learning may occur by deepening at the non-obvious level and by understanding better what are the causes of various situations not easily understood before (Kokkos, 2011). Jack Mezirow argued that a *habit of mind* based on assumptions that act as a *filter for our experiences* (moral consciousness, social norms, learning styles, philosophies including religion, world view, etc., our artistic tastes and personality type and preferences) (Mezirow, 2000, p 17 & 18) is *ethnocentrism*. *Ethnocentrism* is the predisposition to regard others outside one's own group as inferior. A resulting point of view is the complex of feelings, beliefs, judgments, and attitudes regarding specific individuals or groups such as women. Most of the above studies suggest that *ethnocentrism* continues to be present in higher academic institutions and exhibits itself in the form of *unconscious bias*. John Dirkx and Patricia Cranton have researched the unconscious on our meaning-making including what Jung considers as the "unconscious functions."

At this workshop *education through art* will be combined with *storytelling*. According to Matthews (1977), storytelling is an experiential educational approach that supports the acquisition of deep knowledge. By creating and examining fictional life stories, in order to understand our own bias, assumptions and beliefs in relation to professional roles, disorienting dilemmas and possible courses of action is a critical point for transformative learning in the contemporary world, especially within modern societies in crisis -like the Greek society.

**Aim:** The aim of this workshop is to reinforce male and female adult educators share their experiences on gender issues and critically reflect and review how gender

stereotypes and assumptions may affect their adult education role and professional identity. In this discourse we intend to create an open dialogue to search for a common understanding and assessment of the interpretation of educators' beliefs on their identity (Mezirow, 2000).

**Goals:**

- Exchange of experiences, knowhow and practices amongst adult educators
- Critical reflection on experiences lived as significant and relevant to gender issues
- Critical review, reflection and understanding of prior assumptions and possibilities for new courses of action

**Description:** This workshop is developed on the basis of group dynamics and reflected needs towards the understanding of prior and current assumptions in relation to gender and the ways in which these may affect current practices. The workshop includes two modules.

Initially, participants are asked to write down their assumptions and stereotypes on how gender may affect the role, identity and profile of the adult educator. During this first module participants will explore further critical issues and events in which they faced discrimination due to gender. As a second step, participants will be asked to form small groups to further explore and discuss a real event of gender discrimination in the role of either adult educator or adult trainee. They will be asked to write down the event (with no reference made to specific persons), the feelings that arouse as a result of this and the ways in which they managed or they did not manage to solve the issue together with their afterthoughts. Every group would then be asked to present in the assembly what they have discussed and experienced in the small group.

At a second stage, the method of '*education through art*' will be used, in order to approach the issue of confronting bias through transformation at a deeper level. Trainees at the workshop will form small groups and each group will choose a certain piece of art (paintings and especially portraits will be used). They will work collectively to create a life story for the persons depicted in the paintings and they will be asked not only to develop their own story but to make their own meaning by acknowledging their own bias, attitudes, values and behavior in the story of the person. One member of each group will narrate the story they will have created.

Open discussion will follow with the facilitators of the workshop. Facilitators are going to place emphasis on how *art*, *story telling* and *group dynamic exercises* may become useful tools in reflecting and critically examining assumptions and emotions in socially and personally sensitive issues.

**Duration:** 90 minutes

**Maximum number of participants:** 30

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## **MIGRATION**





## **Adaptation or Transformation: Understanding Learning Experience of North Korean Refugee in South Korea**

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### **Abstract**

The paper explored unique learning experience of Irene, a North Korean refugee in South Korea with transformative learning theory questioned by Newman. While reconstructing life history of Irene, the authors identified several questions and weaknesses of transformative learning theory in explaining individual's life and learning.

### **Introduction**

Mezirow's transformative learning theory is one of the most influential theories explaining learning in adulthood. Mezirow (1978) proposed an idea of perspective transformation studying re-entry women's experiences in colleges and universities around the United States in 1970s. Perspective transformation occurs when meaning perspective, a sociocultural and psychological construct formed through socialization process, does not work properly due to disorienting dilemma or life crisis in adulthood (Mezirow, 1978; 1981). From this moment, adult starts to construct more inclusive, differentiating and integrative meaning perspective by critically reflecting on underlying social, psychological and historical assumptions of existing meaning perspective. Mezirow (1981) claimed that perspective transformation is a distinguishing aspect of learning in adulthood and needs to be actively promoted in adult education practice.

Mezirow's early theory on transformative learning has caused vigorous debates and major theoretical and practical issues raised (Taylor, 2008). Firstly, researchers observe perspective transformation as perspective expansion that is exploring and utilizing of new perspective, rather than moving to totally different perspective by discarding older one (e.g. Lange, 2004). Secondly, levels and elements of critical reflection, which Mezirow emphasized as key process of perspective transformation, were analyzed (e.g. Kreber, 2004). Merriam (2004) argued that transformative learning requires advanced cognitive competence as pre-requisite because critical reflection necessitates high level of cognition. Developing ability to reflect critically becomes crucial in education practice in order to foster transformative learning. Thirdly, Dirkx (2006) criticized that Mezirow overemphasized cognitive role such as rational discourse and critical reflection while neglecting affective, emotional aspects of human learning. Dirkx noted that holistic approach, which highlights relationship with others as catalyst to transformative learning, could resolve the problem. Finally, some attempt to analyze the reasons of frustration and failure in transformative learning. Mezirow's original theory has been expanded much by elaborating its concepts and practical aspects through meaningful debates and empirical studies. Recently, Newman (2012) boldly claimed that transformative learning couldn't be found in the real world of experience. He asserts that certain experience regarded as transformation in many studies is just no more or less important 'change.' Since change is the common premise of various definitions of learning, it does not appear

qualitatively to be different in transformative learning. Also, Newman casts doubt that Mezirow's (1978) earlier research interpreted hastily re-entry women's experience in relation with subjectivity and agency and jumped into conclusion that the experience is transformative learning narrative without considering particular context of women's increasing conscientization movement. In advance, Newman criticized that transformative learning theory exists only in rhetorical and theoretical world, and is not capable of explaining the real world of experience.

According to Newman (2012), transformative learning theory assumes that the change in transformative learning is that of qualitatively different kind rather than that of degree. This raises question on the difference between transformation, which is the theory's basic assumption, and change that is common feature of most definitions of learning. Then we can say that 'transformation' observed in practice is not transformation per se but just more dramatic 'change.' Newman also points out that transformative learning theory fails to differentiate between identity and consciousness. Thus, many researches related to the theory regard identity change as consciousness change, which eventually hampers deep understanding of the learning process reorganizing consciousness. Thirdly, referring to Mezirow's 10 phases of transformative learning, Newman refutes that learning is finite experience. Learning is, rather, the change experienced in flow of life and our consciousness changes continuously. Fourthly, Newman notes that the conditions for the 'discourse' which Mezirow mentions as center process of transformative learning are too ideal to be met in reality. Fifthly, most researches that applied transformative learning theory in adult education practice were found that they remain in describing good adult education practices instead of discovering features of transformative learning. Moreover, many theorists and practitioners tend to fall into temptation of interpreting adult learner's original desire or motivation for learning as aspiration for freedom. Lastly, recent research trend on transformative learning, which tries to incorporate spirituality into the theory, was criticized because it discusses learning in metaphysical dimension, instead of explaining learning in the real world of experience in order to help actual education practice. In sum, Newman argues that there is no such separate learning as 'transformative learning', but only good learning.

While conducting a research on validation of prior learning among North Korean refugees (NK refugees hereafter) in South Korea, we ran into the idea that NK refugees seem to engage in transformative learning in the process of settling in South Korea. Furthermore, when we interviewed a female teacher in North Korea, we could made an assumption that her learning experience might be the case for confirming transformative learning theory in the real world of experience. A teacher not just internalized North Korean ideology but also actively spread it. We thought that there is high possibility of perspective transformation for her to settle down in South Korea. Also, there is a previous study supporting this assumption. Cho (2010) reported that NK refugees' informal learning experiences demonstrated features of transformative learning during the early stage of their settlement.

North Korea is one of the most closed countries in the world. There are limited chances for North Korean residents to travel abroad or contact the outside world. Particularly, trip or immigration to South Korea is forbidden. However, as economic difficulty of North Korea became worse since mid-1990s, many North Koreans escape from North Korea to China. Some of them eventually came to South Korea. NK refugees, mostly in their 20-50s, had been taught previously in North Korea to take North Korean ideology on politics, economy and society for granted. So to speak, in Mezirow's way, they are socialized in North Korea. Although migrating to South

Korea was their own initiatives, living in South Korea required changing their way of living and perspectives on the world. Can we explain this NK refugees experience in South Korea in terms of Mezirow's transformative learning theory? Did they reflect critically on their sociocultural and psychological assumptions, which limited their actions and thoughts, formed in North Korea? Or, their experience is not transformative learning but an aspect of good learning as Newman (2012) asserts? With these guiding questions, we investigate theoretical issues between Mezirow and Newman while exploring into NK refugees' learning experience.

### Methods

Life history interview was conducted for data collection. Life history method is used for interpreting the meaning of individual's life experience in the socio-historical context (Cole & Knowles, 2001). We made two criteria for selecting the participants. First, as Merriam (2004) discusses, the participant should be cognitively developed enough in order to perform critical reflection, which is the key process of transformative learning. We selected the participants among those who completed at least bachelor's degree in either North or South Korea. Secondly, the participants must have working experience as a teacher in North Korea. In North Korea, education has very important meaning because it serves as means of training revolutionist manpower for North Korea. Teachers play central roles in this mechanism and they are even called as "occupational revolutionists." Teacher education system in North Korea is comprised of 580 hours of ideological education, 720 hours of liberal arts and pedagogy, 400 hours of subject education, and more than 2,700 hours of military training in four years are added (Kang, Han & Lee, 2014). We assumed that the people who were educated and worked in this kind of system would encounter serious disorienting dilemma when coming to South Korea. In this paper, we analyzed a life history of *Irene* (Nickname) who was an experienced teacher and leader in North Korean society. She is in her 50s and came to South Korea in 2004 with her daughter. Even though she had a college education in North Korea, she began her undergraduate study in Social Welfare in 2005. She received master's degree in Social Welfare in 2009. She also registered in the Master of Divinity program in 2009, which she quit the next year. She is working on her doctoral degree program in Social Welfare since 2011. We interviewed Irene for total five times. Based on the first interview on outline of her life, we made interview questions for the following three interviews to examine transformative learning features in the real world of experience. For the last interview, we directly asked questions for searching perspective transformation.

<Table 1> Outline of Interviews

Number of Interview	Duration	Major themes of interview content
1 <sup>st</sup> interview	1.5 hours	Brief life history Working experience in North Korea Learning experience in South Korea
2 <sup>nd</sup> interview	1.5 hours	Socialization in North Korea Thoughts on North & South Korean system Brief exploration on triggering events
3 <sup>rd</sup> interview	2.5 hours	Motivation for learning in South Korea Searching for disorienting dilemmas Major changes in life history
4 <sup>th</sup> interview	2 hours	Thorough analysis on disorienting dilemmas

		Formative learning about both Koreas Spiritual transformation
5 <sup>th</sup> interview	2 hours	Searching for perspective transformation Additional questions which are unasked before or derived from other interviews Clarifying facts, meaning and research interpretations

### **Life and Learning Experiences of Irene**

#### *Until 1994: Formative Learning and Meaning Perspectives*

Most distinctive feature of North Korean education system is that all students learn about childhood episodes and revolutionary activities of Kim Il Sung, the founding leader of North Korea. Irene recalled that she had to repeat Kim's numerous achievements like a parrot. Education is regarded as the most important means of completing the socialist revolution in North Korea through training the next generation of revolutionists (Kang, Han & Lee, 2014). Irene internalized such a perspective that North Korean society is advancing toward Communist Utopia, which is often represented in the phrase of "living in tile-roofed house, eating cooked rice and meat stew" and "North Korean way of Socialism" during the interviews. Irene was born into a family that was highly recognized since her ancestors took part in Kim Il Sung's revolution. Her father and many of her relatives were members of communist party.

Irene had formed a belief that "South Korean people are groaning under the tyranny of ruling class and the United States military." This meaning frame was primarily formed through school education, and reinforced socio-culturally. During the interview Irene recited a poem describing how desperately ragged South Korean people need help from North Korea. Also, she reminisced that it was very fun to read picture books in which South Korean spies were looking strangely and South Korean children were wearing a piece of a straw mat. Moreover, through radio broadcast, she heard about poor and unhappy lives of South Korean people. To her, South Korea is a "poor society that requires our help."

The meaning perspectives of 'North Korean way of Socialism' and 'poor South Korea' were even strengthened in teacher's college. Irene told, "teachers are occupational revolutionists" as they were dedicated to maintaining social system. Teachers are frequently retrained to acquire knowledge on North Korean history, ideology, and social system. Furthermore, Irene went to a kind of Communist Party leader institution. There, she learned necessary skills for communist leaders. Irene had been socialized on the ideological foundation of North Korea through 20 years of formal and informal education. Irene describes herself as "a person who lived fully satisfied life" in North Korea.

#### *1994 – 2003: Triggering Event & Disorienting Dilemma*

*Arduous march: Suspecting communist utopia.* Irene's belief on Communist Utopia started being shaken due to the severe economic crisis in 1990s. During the period of so-called 'arduous march,' Irene worked without salary. Although teachers in North Korea have priority for ration, economic crisis was so severe that even teachers were not able to receive anything. Moreover, in daytime during this period, many students often refused to come to school so that Irene had to visit each absent student. At night she had to earn money by making clothes with a sewing machine.

Irene noticed that economic system of North Korea had not operated properly even

before the arduous march. After graduating from teacher's college in 1979, she started working in several government offices. During that time she learned how to earn money by swindling fabrics and making clothes and hats out of it. Irene told that market economy started growing even in 1980s. Although she worried about security officials but she couldn't stop it and expanded her business.

When electricity went out and major factories in the city stopped during the arduous march, a lot of people starved to death. Irene told, "there were so many dead bodies that it's like people could step over corpses at the street." Observing piles of corpses were buried at once, Irene thought that she would become one of them. She felt sympathy for absent students and those who left North Korea. Arduous march is the period for Irene to rethink the reality of Communist Utopia of providing its people with "cooked rice and meat stew." Irene started considering North Korea as "a society collapsed during the transition to socialist one" rather than adhering to the concept of the Communist Utopia.

*1994: Death of husband, Kim Il Sung, and father.* 1994 was a very painful year for Irene. Her husband passed away in February by accident, and five month later Kim Il Sung died in July. Moreover, after 100 days of memorial period, Irene's father and uncle were arrested without guilty, and eventually her father was purged and killed. Her father's death due to power struggle after Kim Il Sung's death was a shock for Irene. [Irene refused to talk about the event in detail.] After a while, Irene started to fight against government requesting the truth of her father's innocent death. Although this was a very dangerous action, Irene fought persistently. She even went to Pyeongyang to submit the petition directly to Kim Jung Il, son of Kim Il Sung. Later, Irene decided to submit a petition from China for the sake of family's safety. When she first sent her youngest daughter to relatives in China, Irene was planning to comeback to North Korea after settling her father's case. This was because the social status of her family and relatives remained unchanged even after purge of her father. As Irene knew how to earn money in North Korea, she held good economic status enough to survive during the arduous march. Irene clearly stated, "I am not the person who meant to come here [South Korea]. I was dragged to here by my daughter."

*Return of unconverted long-term prisoners: Rupture of meaning perspective on South Korea.* Irene started to recognize that the actual situation of South Korean society is different from her understanding formed by education and cultural learning. In 1980, while Irene was watching broadcasting news about Gwangju Democratization Movement in South Korea, she saw that building looked wonderful and most students wearing watches and nice trousers, which was different from her images of South Korea. Since she continuously heard that South Koreans were ragged, starving and groaning under tyranny of United States, the scene that showed fat faced common people in nice clothes was unbelievable.

In 2000, when South Korean government repatriated unconverted long-term prisoners, Irene realized that her understanding of South Korean society was totally wrong. She recalled, "At that moment, my head were went off!" It was hard for her to believe that prisoners confined in jail for 40-years had such a healthy face. This made her think, "there is human rights in South Korea."

*2004 ~ Present: Transformative Learning or Adaptation?*

*Unexpected exile to South Korea.* In 2003, Irene went to China because she heard from her youngest daughter in China in two years. She had lost contact with her

daughter. However, when she went to China to meet with her daughter, she heard that she was on the way to Korea. At first, Irene could not even imagine going to South Korea so that she asked back “Where is Korea?” Although Irene tried to dissuade her daughter saying “You cannot go there (South Korea), it’s no place for us,” her daughter’s resolution was too firm to break. Irene fainted and remained in bed for a week. After she woke up, she went to the South Korean consulate in Beijing because she could not let her daughter exile to South Korea alone. Even at that moment, Irene still thought that she would bring her daughter out from the consulate and go back to North Korea. However, after entering the consulate, going to South Korea was irrevocable decision. Irene told us that she did not have any information about South Korea. She never thought of living in South Korea.

*Deterioration in health and Christianity conversion.* Since she fainted in China, her health became deteriorated severely so that she had to lie down on the bed all the time in the South Korean consulate in Beijing. Her physical and mental pain was so intense that even in these days, ten years after the exile, the pain remains. While staying in the consulate, she was asked to believe Christian god (God hereafter). At first, Irene snorted when she heard that the man was made from soil. One day, she felt strange sense of “floating up one meter above the ground” while she was listening to pastor’s audiotaped sermon. It was quite similar to her strange experience that she felt before at the top of Mountain Baekdu. Since then, Irene kept on listening to sermon tape and after settling in South Korea she went to church halfheartedly. In the first four years, any sermon could not touch her heart. At the fifth year, suddenly she felt that she had to make an offering. One day, while singing hymn, tears flow down and she started to think, “I have to give tithes, I had no conscience.” Irene reminisced that she was blessed that day. From that moment, she felt uneasy if she could not go to church, and she prayed at home on Sunday if she could not make it to church due to the illness.

While living in South Korea, the Christian religion was a huge psychological prop. She continued to pray for God’s help when she came across hardships. For instance, when she was having hard time due to the economic difficulties so that she could not pay tuition, Irene prayed and, amazingly, unexpected solution was found. Once church minister’s wife helped her with tuition, and in other case she won prize money from a contest. Irene was giving meaning to these events as “God’s help.”

Also, the religion was one of her important passages to contact South Korean society. Her first friend, whom she met studying social welfare in a cyber-university, was a minister in church. He suggested Irene to work with him at a community child center and she worked there as a social worker. Also, when she was having problem with her tuition of last semester of master’s program, other minister paid her school expenses on the condition of studying pastoral theology subsequently. With this relationship she studied pastoral theology and even she could not finished the whole program, the study helped her in counseling work. Through church and prayer she kept on studying social welfare and made link with related institutions where she can work at.

*Working as a social worker in South Korea.* There were several problems that Irene encountered during early settlement process to South Korea in 2004. The first one was language problem. When she first exposed to the South Korean broadcast in the consulate, she could not understand and needed a translator. Intonation and vocabulary was unfamiliar to her. Since then she always turned on television at home in order to learn ‘South Korean-Korean.’ As Irene even describe herself as a “TV addict,” television was always turned on even when she was working or studying. It

was more difficult when she started her study on social welfare at a cyber-university because lots of English words were heavily used in the lecture. Irene said that she could not forget the day when she involuntarily spoke out loudly “What does that mean?” in the classroom. It was so shameful experience. To understand the lecture and South Korean language, she recorded the whole lecture and transcribed it. Irene recalled, “I dedicated 24 hours a day to studying without sleeping.”

The other problem was to make a living because Irene could not find a job at first. The first job she found was a clerk in clothe mending center attached to a major supermarket. But soon after the employer knew that Irene is a NK refugee, the employer did not paid proper wage. After two month the employer fired her with false charge of stealing money even though she was innocent. At that time, Irene was suffering from rare disease and her daughter was wandering and not going to school due to the difficulties of settling in South Korea. Irene recalled that she always thought of going back to North Korea because life was too harsh for her to bear. One day, however, while Irene was having severe quarrel with her daughter, she made a firm resolution, “I have to adapt to South Korea as soon as possible in order to protect my daughter.” She decided to start all over again. She first registered for social welfare program in a cyber-university. It is because a social worker was the first one that she met in local community office in South Korea. She thought that she could help NK refugees if she became a social worker.

One day, while studying social welfare in cyber-university, she came across an idea, “although there was not such word such as social welfare in North Korea, the system of North Korea exactly embodies social welfare!” The content of textbook and the system that she experienced in North Korea perfectly matched in her view. For instance, to Irene, ‘good work movement’ in North Korea helping a poor, old people living alone is same with ‘voluntary service’ in social welfare. Irene said that as she actually lived in the system, it was not hard for her to study social welfare. Although tuition and language difference hindered her, the content of social welfare itself was very easy to understand once she made a connection to her past experience.

Ten years after settlement in South Korea, Irene evaluates the systems of two Koreas have pros and cons at the same time. “North and South Korea is half and half.” To Irene, South Korea is capitalistic society full of selfish people. It is a society of educational background and qualification where people can buy education and grade. She thought that it was deplorable that there were some people engaging in social welfare for money. However, she found that a lot of unselfish volunteers keep South Korean society from falling apart. After settling down in South Korea, Irene thought North Korea was ‘a prison without bars.’ When she was in North Korea, people considered their way of living as the best one. She came to view North Korea from another perspective.

### **Discussion**

Mezirow (1991) suggested that perspective transformation occurs the following ten phases. First, a disorienting dilemma happens. Second, one starts self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame. Third, one assesses one’s epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions critically. Next, one recognizes one’s discontent and shares the process of transformation. Through this process one also recognizes that others have negotiated a similar change. Fifth, one explores options for new roles, relationships, and actions. Sixth, one is planning a course of action. Seventh, one acquires knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans. Eighth, one tries new roles provisionally. Ninth, one builds competence and self-confidence in new roles and

relationships. Finally, the new roles and relationships are reintegrated into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

We think that the ten phases compose a typical narrative of transformative learning though they are modified slightly from rudimentary theoretical suggestion (Mezirow, 1975; 1991). At the heart of the perspective transformation narrative, there is a sequence of disorienting dilemma to existing meaning perspective, critical reflection, and a new or revised meaning perspective. Does this transformative learning narrative fit into Irene's life and learning experiences?

In the previous part, we reconstructed Irene's life and learning events. In that process we felt that narrative of transformative learning is very weak to explain long-term learning process in one's whole life. It enabled us to understand particular aspects of learning in Irene's life. For example, Irene's meaning perspective can be described as 'North Korean way of Socialism,' which advocates 'Communist Utopia.' It is an outcome of socialization process in North Korea. During the arduous march Irene witnessed many people starving to death in street, which made her realized that North Korean society is not a utopia at all. In terms of transformative learning narrative, this can be a disorienting dilemma that questions Irene's meaning perspective. We could further interpret her father's death as another catalyst for disorienting dilemma that eventually made her exile from North Korea. Irene in South Korea is certainly changed as she described, "North Korea collapsed while transiting to socialism," which is different from her childhood understanding. Her meaning perspective is certainly changed. However, there were still unclear parts remained. Did Irene critically reflect on epistemic, socio-cultural, and psychological assumptions that lie under the meaning perspective? It is hard to say that her change is a result of critical reflection. Assuming that this is a result of critical reflection, we felt reluctant to interpret it as perspective transformation. Mezirow (1978) claimed that when an individual forms a new meaning perspective, he or she could not go back to former meaning perspective. In other words, if rational person realizes irrationalities and distortion of former meaning perspective through critical reflection, the person will discard former one and accept new rational meaning perspective. However, is Irene's changed meaning perspective, after disorienting dilemma, is qualitatively different from the former one? It was not so hard for us to argue that Irene still maintains the meaning perspective of 'Communitarian Utopia.' For instance, Irene thinks that realization of social welfare is also 'Communist Utopia.' She also thinks that North Korean society already had social welfare system even it did not have the word 'social welfare.' To us, Irene did not transform her meaning perspective on North Korean society, but adjusted herself partially to live and think in South Korea. In this sense, Newman's (2012) insight that transformative learning is actually only a matter of degree rather than that of qualitatively different kind is right.

Transformative learning narrative dramatizes one's learning experiences selectively while omitting much more. It seems to us that transformative learning narrative is created through selecting and connecting life events from the perspective of researchers or education practitioners. We found more than enough elements out of Irene's life history to create transformative learning narrative. As we interviewed Irene with keeping transformative learning theory in our mind and tried to reconstruct her dramatic life course with transformative learning narrative, we felt that there are more meanings in her learning life that cannot be spoken in terms of transformative learning process.

Transformative learning theory offers us attractive narrative in understanding those who experienced seemingly dramatic changes in their lives. As human being always



changes and develops and there is a firm belief that change and development is fostered by education and learning, perspective transformation might be the best narrative that education researchers and practitioners want to hear and see. However, we should separate our desire from actual process of learner's life. As our interviews with Irene evolved, we began to think of our starting assumption that transformative learning may explain her life as a NK refugee in South Korea mistaken. It seems transformative learning might have existed fragmentarily, but it was not enough to explain Irene's learning life in its entirety. Then, what kind of alternative narratives can we think of in order to understand Irene's life history?

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**SELF AND IDENTITY**



## Transformative Learning and Bildung or: how to handle Contingency?

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This paper is about a late-modern understanding of 'Bildung' and about the role transformative learning plays in it. Transformative learning is analyzed regarding the question of its core dimension (What forms transform?). In the last part, the importance of 'Bildung' and transformative learning for the constructive handling of contingency is represented.

### 1. Bildung – Legend or Possibility?

In his talk on the occasion of the awarding of the honorary doctorate from the Ruhr-University Bochum, the educational scientist Heinz-Elmar Tenorth described 'Bildung' as an „German legend“ (Tenorth 2011, p. 352). With this statement, he refers to the educational ideal of Wilhelm von Humboldt. It focuses on the determination of 'Bildung' as „the highest and most proportional development of all human powers“ (Humboldt 1980) and thereby on the „greater education of mankind“ (see Tenorth 2011, p. 352, Stojanov 2012, p. 394). For him, the term 'Bildung' is „at best an overarching rooftop, a term, that is able to endow relations between several disciplines, a thesis on the process of growing up that has been accounted as being theoretically fruitful“ and „the thesis of subjects' self-construction“ (Tenorth 2011, p. 359). For Stojanov, this statement is „reduced“ on the one hand and on the other hand, it is an „inadmissible minimization“ and „inadmissible, especially because the understanding of the world in processes of *Bildung* as its objective aspect is disregarded by this minimization“ (Stojanov 2012a, p. 394).

In fact, the educational ideal of Humboldt is not entitled to timeless validity and can only be understood against the background of his time – but nevertheless, it is completely undertaken under no circumstances (see Knoll, Siebert 1969, p. 49). Humboldt's conviction that pure humanity can remain untouched by technical and social developments has to be rejected. An escape from objective claims into subjective inwardness is neither possible nor does it make sense in view of the societal development since Humboldt and against the background of new humanitarian and social-ethically obligations and the necessity of political responsibility. On the other hand, Humboldt recognized very clearly that humanity is potentially threatened by social and technical developments. The question of possibilities of human 'Bildung' remained up to date (see Knoll, Siebert 1969, p. 50) or is more actual than ever before. This becomes very clear in the thoughts of Julian Nida-Rümelin (2013) who sees the core of the misery of the crisis of 'Bildung' in its depth dimension:

“Those reform efforts do not show any idea of a human personality development [...]. By contrast, I plead for a renewal of humanism as a foundation of all practices of 'Bildung' and educational policy. A humanism that has overcome the one-sidedness of the German idealism, that receives the philosophical impulses of the presence and that (re)constructs the submerged unity with the classical and the contemporary pragmatism. A humanism that is not afraid to ask the question what is genuine humanly” (Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 12-13).

For Humboldt, the characteristic “human being” lies in “to seize as much world as

possible and to connect it with itself as tight as possible”, therefore in “the connection of the self and the world to get the most general, liveliest and freest interplay” (Humboldt 1968, p. 283).

Reconstructing of the world and interplay between the self and the world also plays a role for Stojanov's discussion on the concept of 'Bildung': he interprets Humboldt's idea of world as an “undeterminable center, [...] on that all linguistic-cultural perceptions of reality beam towards” (Stojanov 2012a, p. 395) and “the interplay between self and world as the core dimension of *Bildung*” (Stojanov 2012b, p. 76). Thereby, world can never be understood completely by one single linguistic-cultural kind of perception. Thus, the focus is on bringing together as much different perspectives as possible and on translating between different forms that express reality in different ways (see Stojanov 2012b, p. 79). He concludes that 'Bildungs'-founding interaction with the world consists of permanent appropriation of formerly foreign reality perspectives and the associated critical analysis of socialized and pre-reflexive habits. In doing so, the “boundaries of the immediately-de facto given” are to be overcome and one participates in “universalistic borderless practices of argumentation” in that the focus is on the articulation and justification of conceptual meanings with the pursuit of generality (see Stojanov 2012a, p. 395-396). Thereby, the pursuit of generality is of prime importance. Stojanov here stands against the conceptions of, for example, Biesta and Rorty, in which the only task of 'Bildung' is to show alternative possibilities of reality that are explicitly not classified (see Biesta 2002, p. 389) or to peel the individual out of its old self and to help him to become a “new human being” (see Rorty 2009, p. 360):

„[h]owever, by giving up the universalistic dimension of the concept of *Bildung* we are ignoring a very important normative insight which is inherent in that concept and without which it loses its originality. Let's imagine a person who did re-invent himself as a Nazi and who is now performing terrorist ‘counter-practices’ to the ‘normal’ ways of living in a liberal-democratic society, thereby using violence against immigrants, or against persons with another skin color. Shall we call this person's transformation to a Nazi terrorist who fights against the “present” principle of human rights a process of *Bildung*? I think, this would be obviously counter-intuitive. The intuition this example runs counter to is that not all possible transformations of a person should be understood as *Bildung* but only the ones that lead to a better status of that person, or to a higher stage of her human development” (Stojanov 2012b, S. 77-78).

At this point, one has to note that, even if we're talking about the relations to the self and the world, it is all about the relationship to itself, to others and to the world as “universality that cannot be objectivated” after all (Stojanov 2012b, p. 79). As shown on a perspective drawing, self, others and the world have to form points on an unbroken vanishing point-line to be able to mention a process of 'Bildung'. A normative component of 'Bildung' is mandatorily necessary: “The own moral and political value choices get too easily projected into a supposed unchangeable human nature to re-derive them from there” (Nida-Rümelin 2013, p.14). Nida-Rümelin emphasizes the importance of a normative and discursive anthropology for 'Bildung'. A normative self-conception of the shared practice (culture, society, policy etc.) offers orientation on which reasons in regard to the question what is understood by “human” are exchanged (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 14). “According to a humanistic understanding, the particular idea of 'Bildung' represents the normative content of our

self-conception as human being” (Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 52). “[For Stojanov], the worth to be protected special character of *Bildung* especially lies in this semantic core dimension. *Bildung* as human development has to be understood as world opening in the form of interaction with conceptual-ideal contents und meanings that are created in the framework of argumentation practices” (Stojanov 2012a, p. 396). For him, “having one’s eyes opened to reasons” (McDowell 1996, p. 84) forms the central focus of the term ‘Bildung’ and he appoints the “development to a conceptual-argumentative modus of self- and reality-relationship [...] as central theme in all applications of *Bildung*” (Stojanov 2012a, p. 396). This way of thinking is also represented by Julian Nida-Rümelin, who attributes the political and individual human self-determination to a common origin: The ability to form oneself (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 185).

## 2. Transformative Learning: What forms transform?

How can the relation between this understanding of ‘Bildung’ and transformative learning be made? In the first part, it was described that the ‘Bildungs’-founding interaction with the world is accompanied by the overcoming of the immediately-de facto given and the participation in universalistic delineated practices of argumentation (see Stojanov 2012a, p. 396). Jack Mezirow formulates a similar objective for transformative learning:

„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. Transformative learning involves participation in constructive discourse, to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insights.” (Mezirow 2000, p. 7-8)

For Mezirow, the theory’s center point consists of the autonomous and socially responsible acting individual that acts in a democracy (see Mezirow 1997, p. 7, Zeuner 2012, p. 96). Knud Illeris (2014) similarly concludes transformative learning as purposeful, heuristic and holistic learning process with the objective to surpass oneself and thereby to achieve changes in the understanding of the self, the others and the world (see Illeris 2014). Mezirow’s conception has often been criticized for the purely cognitive orientation and the concentration on the individual. In the meantime, extensions of this conception based on Mezirow and conceptions with a different focus have been evolved. For example, Knud Illeris concentrated on the relation between transformative learning and identity or personality development and therewith also focused on emotions and feelings (see Illeris 2014) and O’Sullivan et al, Brookfield or Fisher-Yoshida et al placed collective transformative learning processes in various aspects in the centre of their studies (see O’Sullivan et al 2002, Brookfield 2000, Fisher-Yohida et al 2009).

Attention is less focused on different forms of transformative learning and more focused on transformation per se. Cognition and emotion are not considered as two autonomous entities inside the individual, but the thoughts are based on interaction and interplay. Equally important is that the individual is not conceivable without society: “No man is an island” John Donne already formulated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Every person is an individual being as well as part of a society and both parts are influencing each other mutually. Learning, whether transformative or by other means,

is conceivable only against the background of a triangle with the vertices “emotion”, “cognition” and “society” (see Illeris 2006).

In comparison with other learning forms, transformative learning requires a greater deal of mental energy. The reason for this is the restructuring of a large number of mental schemes at the same time involving the restructuring of the self-organization (see Illeris 2010, p. 55-57). Thereby, as well as in processes of ‘Bildung’, qualitative changes with respect to the self-understanding and the understanding of others and the world are achieved. Because of the high expenditure of energy and the associated efforts and burdens, transformative learning only happens if there is no other possibility and if the situation can't be coped with learning forms that are consuming less energy (Illeris 2010, p. 57). Thus, transformative learning processes are often triggered by fundamental crises or “deadlock situations” (Bransen 2012, p. 13). This means a standstill, a (inner) blockage or borderline experiences. “Learning does not just happen “en passant”. It is caused by subjective reasons” (Meyer-Drawe 2012, p. 15). Those reasons arise from restrictions – crises, deadlocks – that

“channel and limit the access to the world in a miserable way. Every intentional learning is preceded by self- and world-experiences that embody a thorn in the subject's flesh, cause cognitive discrepancies and bring the person concerned out of balance, more or less” (Straub 2010, p. 51).

There are reasons as well that constitute the identity of a person. Identity is defined as “deeply social category”: identity is no characteristic, but a design that is permanently situated in progress and creating itself in interaction with others and the world (see Faulstich 2013, p. 212-213). The “everyday exchange of reasons is understood as cultural and social process in which the subjective perspectives are matched” (Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 39). Human beings identify themselves with their reasons that lead to a statement. In their practices, not their wishes but their ratings, their valuing statements are expressed. There is no practice without rating; every action is based on practical and theoretical reasons. The relation between rating, explanation and interpretation requires something that Nida-Rümelin describes somewhat vague as “coherence”. Contradictory statement explanations seem not to be explainable, contradictory behavior explanations are felt to be incomprehensible and their explanations to be unbelievable. Propensities and wishes are changing, reasons stay the same (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 36-38), but they are not absolutely unchangeable. Justifications can come up against their limits and this fact can be accompanied by feelings of limitation and incoherence: subjective reason enough to learn.

Habits of mind, points of view, sets of expectations to put it briefly: reasons arising from learning - form habits and finally permanent dispositions. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu described their entirety as ‘Habitus’. ‘Habitus’ includes all habits that result from learning. They form tendencies to act in a particular manner – namely as it has been learnt. ‘Habitus’ forms the social individual's principle of thinking, perceiving and acting and ensures the uniformity of their actions in different situation and across different dates (see Fröhlich, Rehbein 2009, p. 110-111).

“Habitus is no scheme for single motion sequences, actions, sentences or thoughts, but something like an engine. Therefore, Bourdieu defines Habitus as *modus operandi*, as a way of acting. If one appropriates dispositions, they are less a single action than a pattern that could be applied and varied to other situations. Soon, an own style is developed that characterizes the exercise and transfer of all actions. This style



forms the core of the Habitus” (Fröhlich, Rehbein 2009, p. 112).

‘Habitus’ is not inborn but acquired: from early childhood, in confrontation with the world and in interaction with others. The individual is integrated in social contexts by birth and is situated in confrontation with the world. In this context, learning processes are considered to be experiences made in confrontation with the world. ‘Habitus’ works according to the principle of ‘living systems’. This means that it is capable of learning in the meaning of ‘being open to the possibility of change or restructuring’. Thereby, the already known is processed to practical knowledge that is modified any further. ‘Habitus’ is organized like a “dispositional network” (Krais, Gebauer 2002, p. 63). This means that it does not process the entire world but is only able to process and integrate what fits into the couplings. As a result, stability and coherence are secured (see Krais, Gebauer 2002, p. 61-64).

What happens if ‘Habitus’ as “dispositional network” runs up against its limits? If there is no possibility to couple and if stability and coherence are losing ground? What happens if the access to the world is channeled and limited and, thus, ‘Habitus’ can’t be modified any longer but has to be transformed? If transformative learning would be necessary? The German educational scientist Peter Faulstich wonders at the same or a similar question:

“The particular filling of structure through action and the changeability of the Habitus through transformative learning and acting is an open question. In learning-theoretical perspective, exactly that is the central problem of the Habitus conception. How far reaches the changeability of the Habitus’ generative schemes- or, vice versa – are there limits of transformation? Could the determined rules, the apparent matters of course, the Doxa as Bourdieu names the implicitly suggested, be resolved or is it possible to break through deeply anchored fundamental positions or habits?” (Faulstich 2013, p. 182).

Bourdieu defines ‘Doxa’ as “attachment in relationships of rules, which, because they are equally justifying the real world and the world of thought, are accepted as natural and unquestionable” (Bourdieu 1982, p. 734f.). The focus in this term is on the unquestionable accordance, the acceptance of things without the knowledge about and awareness on that. ‘Doxa’ is always formally and textually presupposed and can best be described as something preconscious. Bourdieu understands it as historically conditioned: Today’s ‘Doxa’ could quite have been the object of a discussion on different opinions in former time before one of them prevailed and became ‘Doxa’. Thus, ‘Doxa’ are able to pass transformations even if they principally serve for reproduction. (see Fröhlich, Rehbein 2009, p. 79). Krais and Gebauer describe ‘Doxa’ as changeable too:

“The implicitness of the social order easily perishes in experiences of conflict: over and over again, courses of action and interactions are torn out of the unquestionable and taken-for-granted, connections are becoming conscious, there are impulses to think about the own behavior, about the own position in the world or there are approaches to rebel or to a conscious confrontation with the social order” (Krais, Gebauer 2002, p. 73).

The thesis, that transformative learning is concerning ‘Doxa’, is ‘Bildungs’-philosophically supported too: Meyer-Drawe points out, that “we reluctantly become wise, because we think that we are knowing and feel at home in our Doxa (opinion) [...]. We as they who know and our knowledge have to receive a severe blow so that learning is caused” (Meyer-Drawe 2013, p. 70). Learning that opens a new horizon is

accompanied by a transformation and it is associated with a painful farewell from the old, the familiar and from routines. This form of learning disturbs the autopoiesis, the pathic main feature of learning endangers the poetically created interpretations of the self, the others and the world (see Meyer-Drawe 2013, p. 69):

“The pain that is caused by re-learning is based on the necessity to give up the claim for validity of one world view in favor of the insight view, that things can be seen in different ways. It's not about becoming immune against the wrong but about an experience on the own experience that receives a new index as a result. It won't be redeemed; it is – as it were – combed through” (Meyer-Drawe 2013, p. 74).

The Thesis can also be underpinned by Stojanov's line of argumentation. He refers to the overcoming of the boundaries of the „immediately-de facto given“ and the process of “having one's eyes open to reasons” as central focus of the theory of ‘Bildung’ (see Stojanov 2012a, p. 396). Transformative learning processes constitute the bridge between the others/the surrounding and world as overarching principle: „[i]t is precisely the world-relatedness of *Bildung* that grounds its difference from the concept of learning, which focuses on the individual's interactions with her particular *environments* only – and not with the world as such“ (Stojanov 2012b, S. 79). Transformative learning enables to overcome deeply anchored fundamental positions and thereby, it opens the field of the direct surrounding and the accompanied interpretation of the foreign towards the world. Transformative learning forms the human ability to form oneself.

### **3. How to handle Contingency?**

Contingency is considered to be one of the biggest challenges in late-modern societies and is perceived as interdependence between uncertainty and openness of actions. This expansion of possibilities to an apparently unlimited level influences the individuals themselves in many ways as well as all aspects of their lives. They are faced with the necessity of positioning themselves in an apparently contradictory simultaneity of self-determination and heteronomy, boundlessness and narrowness. For the subjects of late-modern societies the question is no longer what is permitted but what is individually possible.

This diffusivity faces the individuals with a considerable problem. They are sensible of the boundlessness when faced with the loss of given and accepted concepts of lifestyle. Considering the structurally societal dynamics (individualization, pluralization, flexibility, mobility), it is no longer a question of the assumption of given behavioral pattern, but a question of creating alternative possibilities (see Faulstich 2013, p. 213). The dealing with heteronomy is only possible by means of “critical reflection of apparent non-flexibility and rigidity. Thus, the most challenging task of learning is named: not to just stand still in view of apparently unchangeable facts but to detect perspectives and chances when being faced with break-ups and contradictions” (Faulstich 2013, p. 213). For Mezirow, critical reflection also plays a key role. It is a necessary part of transformative learning (see Zeuner 2012, p. 95). Critical reflection means to understand

“that it is not [...] about the simple contrast between right or wrong, but about the conflict between different perspectives that oppose without being opposites only. [...]. [Therewith, learners experience] something about their fundamental fallibility. Instead of constantly failing to the illusory concept of general competence, they can fathom and dodge around their limits and, as a result, they are able to

productively develop their space of possibilities” (Meyer-Drawe 2013, p. 74).

The constructive handling of contingency makes it impossible to entrench oneself in the ivory tower of subjective inwardness in the tradition of Humboldt. Instead, it contents the withstand of states of uncertainty and the overcoming of the classical distinction between structure and action by transformative learning processes. It enables the individuals to relocate themselves in respect of the loss of support and orientation function of traditions. The relocation makes possible not only the individual's becoming oneself or self-development, but also becoming human as super-individual form of development (Schmidt-Lauff 2014). First of all, 'Bildung' as becoming human aims at the ability to develop reasonable and well-founded convictions. Secondly, it's about the ability to live an autonomous life and thirdly, the individual reaches the ability to take responsibility on that (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 83). As a result, the individual's identity gains more coherence (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 37), it becomes author of the own life, which means to be sufficiently autonomous and thereby being responsible for the own life and for others. Coherence strengthens the effectiveness of the own reasons for actions and reduces the dependence on conditions (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, p. 87 and 185). Authorship of the own life means individual self-determination and is accompanied by the knowledge that this authorship is limited. It means the realization within manifold situatedness (see Nida-Rümelin 2013, Faulstich 2013).

This is where the wheel comes full circle: the constructive handling with contingency requires transformative learning to become author of the own life und to assume responsibility, also for other people. It requires reducing dependency on conditions, on the unquestionable and the apparently natural and the look beyond the immediately-de facto given. It requires the recognition of the fundamental fallibility and narrowness and the farewell from the imagination of general competence. Contingency requires 'Bildung' – the ability to form oneself.

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**Learning through Walking:  
Pilgrimage, Identity and (Transformative) Learning**

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**Abstract**

This experiential session seeks to provide an open space where participants can slip into the shoes of a pilgrim and explore their experiences on the path of St. James. Specifically, participants will go on an imaginary 800 km journey across Europe and reflect the connection of nature, identity and values.

*Introduction to pilgrimage*

Pilgrimage is known to be an important part of world religions. Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Muslims make sacred journeys to Jerusalem, Mecca, Nepal or Rome to “confirm their faith and their part in a larger identity” (Coleman & Elsner, 1995). Pilgrimages have existed since the early ages of religion and represent not only a humble time on the breadline but also religious boundlessness since the paths cross countries and continents and therefore connect pilgrims all over the world. Pilgrims walk several hundred kilometres towards a religious site. As weeks pass by they bear the pain, treat the blisters and concentrate on finding water, food and a bed to rest their aching body. Following one of the most popular Christian paths to Santiago de Compostela, pilgrims arrive in an ancient city with its impressive cathedral, where Saint James the Great is believed to be buried. According to the local pilgrims’ office, more than 215,000 pilgrims from all over the world arrived in Santiago de Compostela, Spain in the year 2013.<sup>10</sup> Only 40 per cent of them described unexceptional religious motives as reasons for their pilgrimage.<sup>11</sup> Does the idea of confirming faith still apply to pilgrims of modern society? What do pilgrims believe in and what are their motives? Are they looking for group affiliation, and if so, what are the characteristics of the group identity? What happens on the stony paths and how does it affect the pilgrims’ identity?

Despite its religious origin, several studies on pilgrimage in modern society acknowledge the decreasing role of church and religion for modern pilgrims. Lienau (2009) offers a sociological-theological approach and researches the meaning of corporeality for pilgrimage. He states that pilgrimage has similarities with transition rituals and has a catalytic effect for biographical transformations. A similar conclusion is presented by Specht (2009), who states that some pilgrims actively structure their biography using hiking as a transition ritual (Specht, 2009, p. 140). “This can be a confrontation with specific questions regarding further work life or relationship life, but also a retrospective on one’s (work) life or an anxious back-peddalling allowing ideas to be generated for one’s future” (Specht, 2009, p. 89, translation by CA). Without generating a link to transformative learning theory the researchers describe what may be reframed as a disorienting dilemma, critical self-reflection and transformative outcome and these findings validate further research on pilgrimage and transformative learning. Gebhardt (2006) describes a meaning shift of pilgrimage and characterises today’s pilgrim as “a late modern, religious wanderer, building his own religious world and interpreting one’s biography as one’s own, individual path headed

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10 Source: <http://jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statik01.htm> 16.05.2014.

11 Source: <http://jakobus-info.de/jakobuspilger/statik05.htm> 16.05.2014.

for one's own subjective truth" (p. 229, translation by CA). Religion is still part of this model, yet there is a significant change in the main subject. According to his definition, pilgrimage is no longer exclusively religious, but offers a widespread individual and spiritual approach and exemplifies the value for individual and group identity. In the following I will briefly discuss the role of spirituality and outline the main elements of transformative learning theory, before I present Illeris' learning triangle and his model of identity. Subsequently I will connect my findings to transformative learning theory and Illeris' model of identity and present an adjusted model on the basis of my research, before I unveil the workshop I developed to present and discuss my initial findings.

### *Spirituality in adult education*

As Tisdell (2003) hypothesises, "spirituality is a hot topic" in adult education. She presumes that the lack of academic research on spirituality in adult education is grounded in the emphasis on rationality and scientific methods (Tisdell, 2003, p. 25). Although spirituality has a huge impact on our lives, our values and our habits, it has not yet been entirely acknowledged in academic research on adult education and transformative learning. An answer could be using proper scientific methods to research the topic and bring spirituality within the sight of adult educators rather than missing out on the enormous impact of spirituality in an educational situation. Tisdell (2003) made seven assumptions on the nature of spirituality in the context of education. To name but a few, she declares its fundamental role in meaning making and describes that "spirituality is about awareness and honouring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 28). Furthermore, she reasons that "spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 29) and states that "spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 29). This relates to the influence on culture and group development, which is empirically observable within a group of pilgrims, where symbols and rituals lead to strong affiliation and identification. To give two examples, I will briefly describe the pilgrim's shell and the cloth-burning ritual to exemplify the strength and importance of symbols and rituals in pilgrimages. The pilgrim's shell, also known as "Saint James' scallop", is an important symbol that identifies pilgrims as part of a larger group. Every pilgrim wears the scallop, which offers unification towards a group identity. Simultaneously, this has an impact on self-identity, specifically on the pilgrim's self-perception. Burning clothes at the end of the pilgrimage is a strong ritual symbolising the end of the pilgrimage and even more the beginning of a new episode. Pilgrims encountered difficulties, walked through pain and experienced a different way of living. Burning something that accompanied the pilgrim for many kilometres is a sign of a new beginning. Spirituality in pilgrimage is closely connected to inner beliefs and emotions and therefore may support transformative learning experiences.

In the following I will briefly discuss the role of transformative learning theory for pilgrimages before I focus on the question: what defines identity and what exactly can be changed through pilgrimage?

### *(Transformative) learning experiences and pilgrimage*

Mezirow's constructivist theory on transformative learning (1978) explains that one makes meaning of experience and that constant critical reflection leads to transformation. Mezirow has identified ten phases of meaning becoming clarified

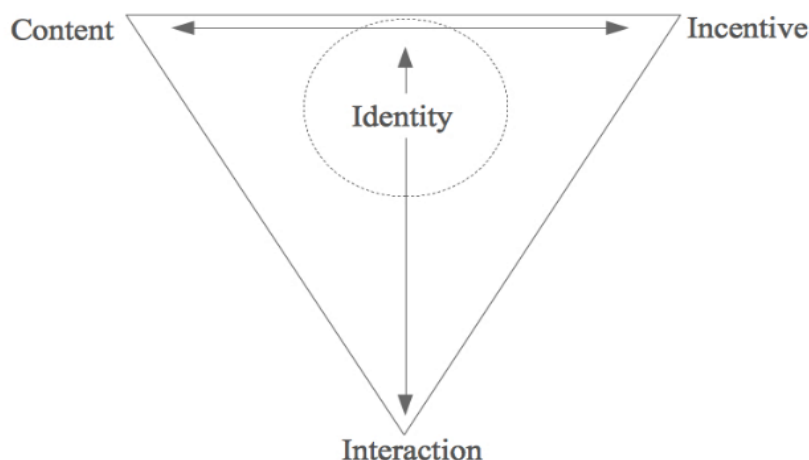
(Mezirow, 1995, p. 50), which in variation may lead to transformation. The main themes of Mezirow's theory are the centrality of experiences, critical reflection and rational discourse in the process of transformation (Mezirow, 1995). Mezirow's phases of transformative learning (1978) include a disorienting dilemma or a crisis as a starting point for transformational processes. Mezirow stated that transformative learning leads to changes in the learner's "meaning perspectives", "frames of reference" or "habits of mind" (Mezirow, 2000) and offers a rather rational perspective on deep adult learning. Other scholars have developed alternative models on transformative learning on the basis of humanists' assumptions. They emphasise emotional, embodied, psychological and spiritual elements (Cranton, 2006; Dirkx, 2001) and therefore incorporate the individual as a whole and immersive person. As Taylor and Cranton (2012) stated, many theories of transformative learning can coexist (p. 3) and due to different foci may be applicable to different research areas. Regardless of the theoretical approach, there are some constants defining the idea of transformative learning: disorientation or crisis, experience and change of meaning perspective.

Although many researchers have found evidence for crisis as a starting point of pilgrimages, there have been only a few studies on pilgrimage and (transformative) learning experiences.

Kurrat's qualitative research on pilgrimage and biography differentiates five types of catalytic situations (Kurrat, 2009, p. 166). Specifically he describes crisis and transitions as starting points for pilgrimages. Although he doesn't offer a link to transformative learning theory, connections to Mezirow's (1978) idea of disorienting dilemma can be assumed. But what exactly can be transformed and how do disorientations develop? Can identity parts be defined that are more susceptible to (transformational) learning experiences?

#### *Illeris' model of identity and my adjustments for pilgrimage research*

There are several explanations for the complex construct of identity and its complementary or even conflicting stages. This paper will discuss Illeris' model on identity (Illeris, 2014) since it appears to be partly applicable to this research on pilgrimage and transformative learning. Illeris built his identity model on the basis of his knowledge about adult learning.



*Figure 1: Illeris' structure of learning and the position of identity (after Illeris, 2014, p. 69).*



He connects the learning triangle (Illeris, 2007) to Mezirow's idea of transformative learning (1978) and describes the interrelation between learning experiences and identity. Illeris' learning triangle consists of the processes of *interaction* and *acquisition* (Illeris, 2007, p. 23). According to his research, all learning involves these two major processes, which "usually take place at the same time and in an integrated way so that they are experienced as one and the same course (...)" (Illeris, 2014, p. 33). Illeris refers to Jarvis' (2009) definition of learning as a base for the learning triangle:

"[Learning is] the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 25).

Subsequently Illeris (2007) presents a learning model (see Figure 1) containing (a) the "interaction between the individual and the social and material environment" (Illeris, 2014, p. 34) and (b) the internal acquisition "of the impulses from the interaction processes, which take place in the individual and connect the new impulses with the results of prior learning" (p. 34) and defines learning as an "individual phenomenon" (p. 34). According to Illeris, the acquisition process always includes an exchange between *content* and *incentive* (p. 34). The incentive element is about "motivation, emotion and volition" (p. 34) and thus has a huge influence on the learning result. Illeris also emphasises that all learning is *situated* and therefore suggests that when researching adult learning one has to reflect the specific environment "both as it is experienced and interpreted by the learner" (p. 34).

Ensuing from this learning model Illeris goes on to explain that one's identity is located in a central position between the individual and its surrounding and "therefore always also involves the same three dimensions, which are involved in all learning, i.e. the content, the incentive and the interaction – or, formulated in more psychological terms, the cognitive, the emotional and the social" (Illeris, 2014, p. 70). On the basis of Freud's construction of personality, Erikson's definition of identity (1968) and Bourdieu's work on habitus, Illeris draws a hypothetical, structural model of identity (see Figure 2). He describes a model consisting of three concentric layers: the *core identity*, the *layer of personality* and the *layer of preference* (Illeris, 2014). The *core identity* is the centrepiece "that keeps the complexity and all the elements of the identity together" (Illeris, 2014, p. 70). According to Illeris, the core identity can admittedly be changed and developed by learning processes, but simultaneously has the task of "securing continuity and therefore changes usually happen gradually and often imperceptibly if the individual is not exposed to sudden and profound changes of life conditions" (Illeris, 2014, p. 72). The core identity "is the instance that fundamentally contains the experience of being a distinct and particular individual, being the same in different situations and connections, and also through the entire life course, in spite of any development or change" (Illeris, 2014, p. 70). While the core identity is about "the individual's relationship with her- or himself" (p. 72), the two surrounding layers are "more turned outwards towards the surrounding world" (p. 72). Illeris' *layer of personality* includes "who and how the individual wants to be and appear in relation to others and the surrounding world" (p. 72). The personality layer "typically includes conditions like values, attitudes, convictions, meanings, understandings, forms of behaviour, patterns of experience and objectives, and social

elements like manners, conventions, habits of communication, patterns of collaboration, empathy, obligingness, social distance and caution” (p. 72f). Illeris describes these conditions as relatively stable and able to change for good reasons. However, the layer of personality is “more vulnerable to influence” (p. 73). Illeris connects this layer to what Mezirow refers to as *meaning perspectives* and *frames of reference* (Mezirow, 2000) and concludes that “changes in this layer are the usual target of transformative learning” (Illeris, 2014, p. 73). The third element of Illeris’ structure on identity, the *layer of preferences*, is described as being unstable and changeable and contains elements that “belong to one’s self-perception, but to which the individual is less devoted” (Illeris, 2014, p. 73). According to Illeris, the layer of preference is comparable to Mezirow’s *meaning schemes*, although he acknowledges that there may be some meaning schemes “that are of so much importance to the individual that they subjectively reach into the personality layer” (Illeris, 2014, p. 74). Learning that has only a shallow influence on the person’s preferences is considered to be not transformational. Illeris offers a specification by discussing Piaget’s concept of accommodation or additional learning, while “nothing of importance is changed in the self-perception or how one is perceived by others” (Illeris, 2014, p. 74). Illeris supplements his basic concept of identity with various part identities, which consist of two main areas “that can be broadly termed our attitudes and our practice” (Illeris, 2014, p. 74) and which are different within different cultures and groups and show different kinds of practice (Illeris, 2014, p. 74).

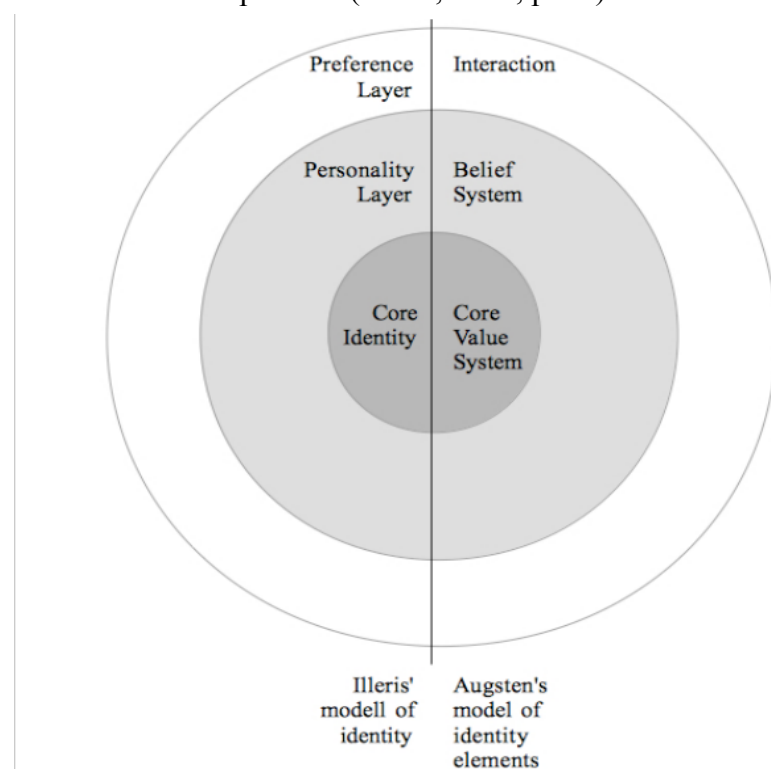


Figure 2: Combination of Illeris' model of identity (after Illeris, 2014, p. 71) and Augsten's model of identity elements.

During my research I started working with Illeris’ model of identity and at this point my data correspond with his model to the extent that the general existence of three layers is applicable. Yet I chose to adjust the definitions of the concentric layers and explain the interactions and dependencies between them.

Data show that every behaviour, thought and action of my narrators is mostly a

consequence of beliefs and convictions, which are partly inherited through the process of socialisation. It can therefore be assumed that there must exist something that stands behind those actions. I have found evidence that the narrators aim at something of which they are not always conscious. A central concept verbalised by pilgrims is a common *search for something*. I assume that this search is based on a perceived deficiency within one's core element of existence. During the interviews the narrators sometimes explained their motives for pilgrimage and described "a lack of time for myself" (B13), "a wish to live a different life" (B7), a strong feeling of "doing the wrong thing" (B7) when holding on to the present commitments, or a strong desire to get close to themselves and perceive their desires rather than spending time fulfilling roles they feel committed to (B13, B9).

These narrations exemplify a deeper system of desires and convictions, which seem to be connected to elements whose satisfactions are existential to the narrators. One narrator articulated an "unsatisfied deep value" (B13), which consequently led me to name this basic element *core value system*. The concentric layers depend on the core value elements and are a projection of one's values, even if the arising processes are not merely conscious. On the basis of one's values a person develops convictions, which constitute a *belief system*, which in my model represents the first layer. The beliefs can be hidden, and communicated through sentences that express one's understanding of life, one's idea of family or statements regarding the purpose of money, work or friendship. The outer layer is characterised through direct *interaction* with one's environment and consists of direct behaviour and habits, perceptible by the communication partners. The three elements of this model are in constant interchange, whereas the core value system seems to hold a right of veto, if one faces new experiences and thinks about integration or rejection of the new elements.

Let me explain the model through this notional example:

A married woman believes she is responsible for raising her children (layer of beliefs). Therefore she quits her job and stays at home to provide the children with food, water and care. This behaviour of a mother and housewife is visible to the neighbours, yet they don't necessarily know the subjective reasons for her life change. Through communication they might find out about her belief without knowing anything of the core value element that is internally satisfied through the specific behaviour (layer of interaction). This basic element within the subject can be a satisfaction of the value of "family", or the value of "freedom" to just be there for the kids (core value system). At this point it is interesting to observe one's behaviour and belief issues if several values are conflicting. Continuing this example, the woman may experience a conflict when her value of "self-improvement" (e.g. career, further education) is not fulfilled and she may question her actions and start weighing up the supporting and conflicting reasons.

Concurring values may provoke deep crisis and being connected to the idea of transformative learning therefore may pave the way for transformative learning outcomes. Data show that not every value conflict results in a deep shift of beliefs and behaviour, which would characterise a transformational process. At this point I go back to Illeris' description and agree that one has to be willing to integrate new findings and also need to consider the change to be worth the effort. Consequently even if a person experiences a crisis (i.e. two conflicting values) and has an idea of how to solve the conflict, one is not unconditionally tend to change something. Yet, inspired by Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894), the question needs to be asked

whether a mind that is stretched by a new experience can ever go back to its old dimensions?<sup>12</sup> This needs to be observed during the next phases of my research on pilgrimage, identity and learning experiences. In the following I shall briefly outline my research project and provide evidence for my allegations by presenting data excerpts from two interviews that were conducted during the first phase of research.

*Research project: Learning on stony soil*

My ongoing dissertation research about the learning impact of pilgrimages started in December 2012. The first phases of my study were based on qualitative narrative interviews that have been coded and analysed using the framework of Grounded Theory Method. At this point of time I have conducted 13 interviews with German pilgrims aged 30 to 80, who all completed the Camino de Santiago/path of St. James across France and Spain. My focus is on learning processes before, during and after the pilgrimage. Since my results will be grounded in the data, I critically examined the theoretical descriptions of transformative learning theory. It appears that learning experiences on pilgrimages are closely connected to the pilgrims' embodied experiences and their emotions, which leads to a humanist's theoretical approach. During my research I have found diverse reasons for pilgrimages: e.g. to experience adventure, to explore nature, to be away from one's job and/or family, to just get away from one's usual life, the survival of a life-threatening disease or even the death of a beloved person. Some of the narrators gave religious reasons but emphasised their rejection of church affiliation. As diverse as the reasons of the individuals are, they are all united in an overall search for something. I was able to extract different learning outcomes, which appear to be strongly connected to the pilgrims' emotions and the willingness to integrate new findings into one's life. The journey of change doesn't necessarily start with the first steps on the path of Saint James. The mainly unconscious wish for change starts before the pilgrim decides to walk more than 800 kilometres on stony soil. And if there is transformation included it may not be completed by crossing the finish line in Santiago de Compostela.

In the data I have found learning experiences that I will now briefly discuss within two interviews using my model as a matrix to organise the data. Illeris describes part identities, which all consist of his three layers and which are all interconnected. When researching pilgrimage and identity it is essential to examine whether there is something like a part identity or a group identity. Data show that a common individual identity seems to exist that is characterised as being "different from the usual self" (B7). Consequently I also assume a special group identity that differs from anything experienced in other areas of life. I will refer to these two working concepts as *pilgrims' identity* and *pilgrim-group identity*, which I will briefly discuss first, before presenting initial findings of the research.

*Pilgrims' individual and group identity*

The narrators of my research project referred to themselves as *pilgrims* and described particular behaviour and retrospectively a mostly unconscious focus shift while being on a pilgrimage. Pilgrims are on a search for something and therefore they left behind their family, friends, job and familiar surroundings to live out of a backpack and to concentrate on the bare necessities: food, water and a place to sleep. What they expected to be a tremendous sacrifice turned out to be a simple, but satisfying way of

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12 Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.: American physician and poet. Source:  
[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1203736.Oliver\\_Wendell\\_Holmes\\_Sr](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/1203736.Oliver_Wendell_Holmes_Sr). 22.05.2014.

living, although they were facing their fears, deepest desires and greatest abysses and started “to romance the shadows” as Dirkx once metaphorically described. Pilgrims sometimes described enjoying finding peace and resting in churches or sacred places and were drawn to those quiet, hidden spots far from the turmoil of the pilgrims’ path. When asked to define “a pilgrim”, the narrators also mentioned that a spiritual desire was fundamental for pilgrims. They also showed “typical pilgrims’ behaviour”, such as thinking about one’s life and walking through emotions.

The *group identity* reflects the spiritual journey and the felt separation from the “usual life”. The narrators mentioned the fact that it was not important where they came from, because they all headed towards a similar goal. The pilgrim-group identity was created mainly through symbols and rituals, such as the pilgrim’s scallop and the yellow sign of direction. By spending time together and sharing beds, baths, food, thoughts and “a search for something” (B9), all the interviewed pilgrims described a strong group identification on the basis of shared values and beliefs. The identification mostly continued to exist long after the pilgrimage ended. The narrators put emphasis on experiencing support in the group after accomplishing long-lasting distances walking alone through rain or mud and feeling sad or lost for several reasons. Illeris’ idea of part identities can also be applied to my model of identity. The pilgrims described different behaviours and beliefs connected to different social groups or roles to be held. I shall now discuss chosen passages to exemplify my findings:

Narrator B13 described having had a “good life” prior to the pilgrimage. Despite living in a big house with his wife, having “wonderful friends” and “a very good job”, he still had a strong desire to leave everything behind and walk the path of St. James. During the 800 km walk he found out that although he seemed to “have everything one needs to live”, he was missing out on a very important element all the time that he defined to be essential: personal freedom. He explained the term by describing how important it seemed to be to fulfil roles expected by his surroundings at the expense of his own wishes and desires. Walking through quiet nature and arguing with himself and with accompanying pilgrims, he found out that he was missing out on fulfilling his “vital value of freedom”. Consequently this led to a competing situation between the values of freedom and conformity. During the pilgrimage he faced his desires and recapitulated several situations in his life that had influenced and formed his beliefs and behaviours, e.g. the loss of a beloved person and his family’s ideas of a “good life”. He described the pilgrimage as a first step towards a different life. In the following years he subsequently changed his life, quit his job and divorced his wife.

Narrator B7 referred to himself prior to the pilgrimage as being family-oriented and dutiful and outlined a life consisting of obligations and commitment. He described beliefs and behaviour he adopted from his parents and grandparents and that “just never were mine”. He described difficulties facing the chronic illness of a beloved person and the consequences resulting in the full day care he felt obliged to give. He felt a deep wish for change without knowing what to change exactly and how to accomplish the expected difficulties. During the pilgrimage he understood that he didn’t live according to “the things important” to him and started to understand where his beliefs and attitudes were grounded. By accomplishing the 800 km walk he felt assured that he could accomplish anything and questioned some of the beliefs that he felt restricted his life. One narration exemplifies the changes he went through and is an example of the transformational power of pilgrimages:

“I feel there [on the pilgrims’ path, CA] is something, there I am vivacious [lively, spirited, CA]! I am different! There I truly live. It is not just an existence, which of course is important too. Now I do many things differently. I am

outgoing with people I meet now. In the past I would not have even talked to you! For God's sake! You wouldn't even have got a word out of me!" (B7, 2:24:06)

The mentioned conflicts within the pilgrims' core value system affected the pilgrims' beliefs and behaviour and sometimes affected several part identities (e.g. work identity or family identity). Fundamental for these changes seemed to be (a) interactions with oneself and with others to constantly reflect one's perception and existing value system, (b) deep emotional experiences of strength and love to gain self-trust and self-reliance, (c) the willingness to adopt new findings into one's life regardless of any repercussions, and (d) embodied experiences and the feeling of being whole and not split into body and soul or into several roles. The pilgrims perceived their desires and due to the time of deprivation they found out what was really important to them. Pilgrimage itself has been described as a "microcosmos of life" (B9) and as a "journey to self" (B7) and can be considered to be a transformative encounter, if one is searching for change and is willing to integrate new findings, no matter what consequences need to be faced.

#### *Workshop: Slipping into pilgrims' shoes*

To explore the above topic I developed a workshop based on my research on pilgrimage and learning. The 90-minute workshop aims to offer an inside look at the variety of learning situations during pilgrimages and seeks to provide the opportunity to slip into the pilgrims' shoes and to experience different learning outcomes using the tool of imaginary journeys. In an appreciative surrounding the participants are invited to affiliate with their emotions evoked from the practice and the narrations of the pilgrims. On the basis of two interviews from the first research phase we will then discuss individual situations and connect the findings to the above-mentioned theories.

The workshop combines quotations from pilgrims' narratives, symbols and embodied practices to evoke an understanding of the pilgrims' unique and deep emotional experiences. Special emphasis will be put on the participants' emotions, reflective discourses and the connection to Illeris' theory of identity and transformative learning

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## Poetic Word and (Trans)formation: Questions of TL Theory through the Embodied Mind

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### Abstract

In this paper, I want to introduce how TL theory interrogates me as I construct my Ph.D research in a constructivist, systemic frame, and present how I think 'poetry making' may help me address my research questions while remaining curious about issues of transformation.

### Introducing my Research in relation to Transformation Theory

In line with the literature that has developed a more holistic conceptualization of transformative learning theory (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006; Kokkos, 2011; West, 2011), in this paper I'd like to focus on the embodied character of knowledge and (adult) learning, that are also recognized as biographically, historically and culturally founded in Mezirow's work (Mezirow, 2000, in J. Mezirow, & Associates, 2000). In this paragraph I am presenting the theoretical framework where my research sits; in the second part, I will look at some questions of transformation that particularly interrogate me; in the conclusion, I will sketch a biographical, aesthetic approach to research that I am finding promising with which to explore questions of life and human becoming.

My Ph.D research looks at how university students in education understand their 'relationship to knowledge' (i.e. a somehow holistic, biographical, culturally aware understanding of subjective processes of knowing), in Italy and the UK, and how this relates to their professional learning and identity construction. I am using a constructivist, systemic view of learning as an emergent quality of complex systems of inter-actions within a specific context (Formenti, 2009a), where research into human learning asks questions of how we can look at the relationships where it might happen. Professionalism may be understood as a non-linear process of *Bildung*, or *formation* in French (the *learning process* at large, encompassing formal, informal, non-formal and experiential learning, Dominicé, 2000), or becoming a person in society (Jarvis, 2009); thus, as a complex process that is not separate from living. Higher education, in an ecological frame, is thought of as profoundly related to wider questions of human being, of life and of value (Barnett, 2011a), and as an experience through which one may learn to doubt unquestioned beliefs, and to cultivate 'faith' in the world and 'hope' in the future (Barnett, 2011b). Research was recently conducted to investigate how social, psychological, as well as structural conditions may or may not facilitate learning in HE, and how learners actually feel towards change, and at different times. When is a space good enough, and how do transitions happen (West et al., 2013)?

And still, how much is such a comprehensive understanding of education shared in our societies? Preoccupations with an increasing *marketization* of Western educational systems lament a loss of 'mystery', together with the rise of reductionist frames in the pursue of what shall be more measurable learning (Biesta, 2010; Barnett, 2011a; West et al., 2007). In the constructivist view of Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana (1987), the expression *embodied* knowledge refers to the idea that epistemology (as *logos* on the world, or about how knowing is done, Bateson, 1987) and ontology (as actually being and acting in the world) can be conceived as intertwined in the same



co-evolutionary process of all knowing-living beings. Living beings are in fact seen as constitutively *in a relationship* with the environments they contribute to create, at the same time as they construct (become) themselves. Knowing is living, living is knowing. So what is it exactly that transforms, in transformative learning?

A constructivist, systemic viewpoint on transformative learning may describe it as a (partial) re-organization of a living system in relation to its context towards an organizing theory, or set of assumptions, values and actions that is more satisfying to the subject at a given moment (Fabbri & Munari, 2005) and makes for a good enough life (Formenti, 2013). It is a holistic perspective that researches the subject as subject of experience, sensation, emotion, belief, action, and meaning-making in a relationship with the other. I can't escape two inseparable questions at this point:

- if learning how to unlearn and change the theories we live by invites us, as theorising beings, to come closer to our body-mind, then how can critical reflection alone (as in Mezirow, 2000) reach the mystery of 'unspeakable transformation' (Bateson, 1979)?

- as a researcher, how does TL theory interrogate me in relation to my (undertaking a) Ph.D research?

When considering questions of learning and transformation, it seems that the width and depth of our questioning extends. To better organize our thoughts, it may be useful to refer to Gaston Pineau's relational conceptualization of *formation*, or how we bring forth our human form within an ontological triangle combining relations to the world (eco), to the others (etero), and to ourselves (auto) into a vision of an *auto-etero-ecoformation* (as explained in Formenti, 2009a). This differentiates further levels of complexity, and requires more attentiveness, humility and respect on our part as researchers of human life. An 'auto/biographical imagination' (deriving from sociologist Liz Stanley views on auto/biography, Miller, 2007) would suggest that doing academic research has to do with matters of (trans)formation in itself, and I am also experiencing how my personal relationship to the object and questions of research, with *knowing*, informs the whole process. The 'auto', or self, may be as challenging in research as the rest. This care for the interacting of subjectivities from which (academic) knowledge locally emerges, within macro structures, I found that resonates with my experience as a researcher and a learner, and helps me open questions: of narration, of co-construction, of recursive processes, of levels of description, of knowing and not knowing, and of the beautiful risks (Biesta, 2013) of learning in research. How do I think of transformation when I design and facilitate a process of co-operative research-formation with a biographical orientation (Formenti, 2013)?

Formative effects of working with our 'learning biographies' (i.e. stories of learning, as investigated in Dominicé, 2007) may encourage learners in their working lives to think/act more ecologically, and take more care of how they enter in a relationship with subjects and contexts, as well as to be more open to the possibility to transform and move their 'maps' or understandings, and thus access other possible actions (Formenti, 2013). I have the impression that, in this moment, becoming a researcher asks me to venture with respect and curiosity into the mystery of adult learning and *formation*, and to become more attentive to questions of holistic change which defy articulation.

### **Raising Questions of Learning and Transformation**

Together with Laura Formenti (2009a), I am finding it useful to think of transformation as a 'universal, basic quality of life'. We are constantly *becoming*

human, i.e. undergoing transformation within biological life that implies cyclic, structural processes of construction/deconstruction. Within this, forms and possibilities of trans-formation are naturally generated, and therefore: 'we don't need to provoke it, as it happens all the time' (Formenti, 2009a, p. 5). If we want to be aware of our mind as embodied, we need to act coherently ('if you desire to see, learn how to act', von Foerster, 1981). A systemic sensitivity towards learning interrogates irreverently the more rational, controlling and linear views of TL theory in its Mezirowian understanding! I wonder, to which extent can we influence transformation?

Jack Mezirow's foundational theorization of TL states 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' (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 7). Among the many developments of TL theory, psychologist Celia Hunt (2013) distinguishes two main groupings: the Jungian perspective that builds on deep learning, symbolism and the self (Boyd and Myers, and more recently Dirkx), and the Mezirowian approach that relies on reason and criticality (Hunt, 2013, p. 63-64). Where Mezirow describes a rational aspect of a critical discourse of the 'social self', the Jungians highlight the inner work to familiarize with subjectivity and one's sense of self. The first process of critical reflection we may call reflectivity, whilst the Jungians' more passive discernment seems closer to reflexivity (Hunt, 2013, p. 67). According to Hunt, from a bio-psycho-social approach (and drawing on the research by neurobiologist Damasio), active reflectivity and more passive discernment happen in the brain through a 'cycle of transformation', which integrates right and left hemispheres, i.e. more bodily and more language-based processes, 'with the embodied-experiential mode preceding the critically reflective' (Hunt, 2013, p. 77-78).

In the constructivist, systemic approach, as we take learning to be a mysterious, socially constructed and biologically rooted phenomenon, the more (apparently) passive moves are central to our transformation. Human learning is a 'multiple, systemic and stratified phenomenon that involves biological, psychological, relational, institutional, social, even planetary levels' (Formenti, 2014, p. 124). Learning does not happen just in the brain, but in relationships, thus in communication, as it is *enacted* in a circularity of perception *and* action, emotion *and* thinking. For Gregory Bateson, 'learning II is a corrective change in the set of alternatives' that we usually access to, or a 'change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated' (Bateson, 1972, p. 293). We can learn to draw distinctions differently. As it happens in corporeality, learning *builds habits*: frames of reference are in this sense embedded in our structural organization, as well as they are continuously created in our learning contexts. To think of transformation in these terms helps us put aside our tendency to desire to be in control of situations, in a way that we may overlook the complexity of multilayered contexts, relationships, evolution, and the worlds of experience we live in. Biographical research can be helpful in that it questions the *how* of past experiences (how did I learn what I learned?), hence 'it opens space for *reflexivity* (second level of reflection)' (Formenti, 2014, p. 126).

As recent critical contributions pointed out, there may be a need to integrate the understanding by Mezirow, focusing on critical discourse for social emancipation, with an attention to more subtle dimensions of subjectivities and feelings (West, 2011). Social emancipation may be pursued through 'participation in constructive

discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting insight' (Mezirow, 2000, p. 8). Is the pursuit of 'liberation' from acquired symbolic models actually possible, or can we think of it more in terms of auto-eco-eteroformation? What do we mean exactly by emancipation or empowerment, when we take it as an ultimate ethical concern of our educational practices? How does reason relate to knowing and acting? I found it helps my endeavor to imagine learning as increasing our capacity to comprehend (embrace) life. This is the language that Hunt (2013) uses in her work on creative life writing and transformation: we may have to do with something emerging from movements of subverting, disrupting, stretching, expanding consciousness, and inhabiting 'betweenness'. May adulthood have to do with becoming more able of feeling and celebrating complexity? May relationships come before (be foundational of) the intellectual negotiation of meaning?

These are in the end questions of agency in an overly uncertain, rapidly changing world. For Mezirowians, we become more clear-thinking decision makers if we improve our ability to direct our life. In a systemic view, the question of agency remains inherently multilayered and problematic, as it develops within the boundaries of inter-dependence between individual life, and the context at large. 'Humans are characterized by an ongoing and fluctuating becoming: stories are open-ended [...] Agency is not an 'individual matter': to learn how to act is a relational process' (Formenti, 2011, p. 8). We may interrogate how inter-action is embedded in the stories adults tell, and how awareness is there (or not) as subjects learn: how can we investigate what happens 'beyond consciousness and purposefulness' (Formenti, 2011, p. 9), and is this useful? I feel it generative to keep looking for 'theoretical friends' who may help me be in uncertainty, and address my PhD research with a vivid curiosity towards:

- Questions of *formation*, between individuation/autonomy and dependence/connectedness;
- Questions of mind/body, thinking/action, and holistic learning.

### **Playing with Poetry, and keeping Curious to Transformation**

When we make poetry playfully from our own biographical material, we may see ourselves as engaging in the construction of a holistic understanding of life as a complex matter, an endeavor that may need to trigger and combine more modes of knowing (Heron, 1996). The 'challenge of complexity' invites us to recognize knowing as inherently uncertain and incomplete, and thus to look for methods of knowing which may be respectful of this (see the works by Morin, von Foerster, and Maturana in the 1980s). I am drawing on the work by Laura Formenti to develop an auto/biographical research-formation with a compositional sensitivity that may propitiate learning in cooperative groups. Biographical practices in general research the relationships between subjects and structures, value uniqueness, and invite subjects: to position themselves, to research patterns in experience, to engage in conversations, and to create complex theories. Formenti uses a *spiral of praxis* to compose a practice of holistic learning, where an embodied, collective knowledge is produced through a cycle of: experience, representation, conversation, and action. In the moment of *aesthetical* representation (i.e. responsive to the pattern that connects, Bateson, 1979), the mystery of embodied experience may become accessible in some forms, and as much as it is possible. 'All language is rooted in metaphors, and these are rooted in the body' (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), so that our personally/socially constructed knowledge reveals the metaphors we live by (Formenti, 2009a).

This is where poetry-making may especially look as a valuable practice of writing as researching our analogical ways of knowing/becoming, for it leans onto the mystery. I find it intriguing to think of the 'betrayal' of the known that a biographical practice of poetic writing may engender: 'writing is a generative action, *in action* (Varela) of the knowledge produced by the subject, and of the subject himself' (Formenti, 2008, p. 179, my translation). New things may be known, in the process of poetry-making. From the poems, reading/listening takes place as con-vocating the other in a *dialogue*, and finally a conversation may develop where thinking engages and builds the collective mind. *Cum-versari* ( i.e. roaming about, wandering with someone) is a common human activity of being together, sharing a language, and looking for the words to say, to think, and to live. In the systemic view, it is thought that an open, creative, and unpredictable conversation *may* transform us. 'How do I know what I think, if I have not yet spoken to anyone?' (Checchin, in Formenti, 2014, p. 121), and how may we use this intelligent understanding to better co-ordinate our coordination of actions with others, as Maturana would say?

Leonora Cupane (2009) uses poetry-making in the frame of composition. Among the many practices of creative writing, I grew curious in particular of how poetry-making may help me address my research questions while keeping open to issues of transformation. In Cupane, poetic writing is an exploration of the playfulness and richness of a 'language of Sunday', where the body/mind is evoked, and we can exercise together to take more care of relationships, lifelong and lifewide learning. In previous occasions, when I myself took part into workshops of research-formation, I had the impression that poetry-making may elicit a more relaxed and amused participation (can we learn without passions?) in researching into our similarities and uniqueness, and making space for wider views. It seems as if a poetic use of words could trigger our more 'social, reciprocal and co-existential' logic (Formenti, 2008), where emotional resonances are supported by holding structures of rhythm and versification. May a poetic sensitivity help us build a good enough space for adult trans-formation?

We may say that poetry provides instruments with which to construct comprehensive understandings through the use of an abductive, horizontal way of thinking (Bateson, 1972). Abduction was theorized by Bateson as a form of lateral thinking, as we find it in humour and poetry, which irreverently builds bridges between distant areas of meaning, illuminates 'truths' and dis-places our understanding of things. Metaphors may help recompose our experience of life, as they allow us to perceive differences, as well as to make symbolic equivalences, thus linking logics and emotionality which together make us human. In fact, meta-phors stay for something else or in between worlds: they are imaginative (symbolic) transpositions of somatic (bodily) events, so poetry may be seen as engaged in 'giving back a body to the word(s)' we use (Cupane, 2009). Also other rhetorical figures, like oxymora, and rhyme themselves create brotherhood between separate semantic areas, and allow us to temporally situate words in a common imaginative field that we can relate to... and that may reveal to us something new. Contrasts might be harmonized and readdressed more creatively. Each word is played with poetically when we dare expand its sphere of resonance. A word is re-cognized, or encountered anew, as if not entirely known, and so it becomes able to tell us things we did not know before. An expansion of meaning goes hand in hand with an expansion of consciousness. A word can 'make truth(s)', i.e. unearth meaning beyond logic and held belief, because it is welcomed in its polysemous character and 'sound' connection to other far-away words. According to Formenti (2009b), we can write in a state of con-fusion, of lightness, of wildness, and

words may emerge that seem not to belong to us, and may repel or scare us. Whenever our held frames cannot give us balance and handhold, there may be this generative con-fusion. It is a sort of vertigo, that may unfold other inner dialogues without words, beyond awareness, with its own times.

Metric gives a structure and a harmony to our thinking, and helps each word expand its width and be de-familiarized from its established uses: 'the themes of shape and of rhythm are inextricably interrelated. It is in fact rhythm that gives body to poetry' (Cupane, 2009, p. 57, my translation). In poetry-making we can play to compose shape and rhythm, or 'form' and 'action', in something that may take us closer to our embodied mind, may 'emotion' us, and may be conducive to our further becoming. As the sound of words evocate the vibration of breath and life, the metric of words gives it beating, i.e. the alternation of stillness and movement. This, says Cupane, meets our human need both for continuity, and for the stimulus of what is new. When poems are read and listened to, when voices are intertwined, when other poems are composed together in search for displacement and wider understandings, the conversation is likely to be lively and rich in imaginative possibilities. The pleasure of languaging, and bodily perception, of life is there.

There may be some good suggestions here, I think, in terms of learning as transformation and becoming more-of-oneself: there are questions of authenticity as a process of individuation, as well as connection; questions of how to construct an embodied knowledge that may inspire renewed action, and questions of how we can meet the unexpected through the vivid language of life and emotion. I am asking myself if poetry may linger on the threshold between body and language, and allow us to wander together in what we may not yet know about our unquestioned beliefs. How do we change our relationships with the world (how we know), in a way that is more mindful of our need for autonomy in connectedness? In my research, I want to invite students to investigate their relationship to knowledge, and to look at their biographical understandings from a playful, embodied and imaginative perspective of poetic play, where some deep learning may happen.

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## **Bildung as a transformation of self-world-relations**

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### **Abstract**

Based on the theory of *Bildung* (Koller 2012) and the theory of *transformative learning* (Mezirow 1997) we attempt to bring both theoretical perspectives together. The synopsis lays stress on the aspects of *why* and *how* transformation of self-world-relation takes place. The results of our study of student's essays display three types of changes.

### **Introduction**

The traditional German concept of *Bildung* fell into oblivion in recent years. In times where a 'knowledge society' is promoted (e.g. BMBF, 2012) and members of societies need to be able to stand acceleration processes (Rosa 2008) in an more complex world *Bildung* has to be redefined. Since the consideration of "Qualification and competences" play an essential role in European education policy papers (e.g. concept of lifelong learning , EQF, NQF) and in education institutions (e.g. competence-oriented curricula) the question of what we entitle as *Bildung* and education arises. The concept and the elements of *Bildung* are traditional objectives of educational science and related fields especially in Germany (e.g. Humboldt). Nowadays, the concept of *Bildung* seems not to be adaptable in a continuously changing, globalized world. However, current perspectives of "learning theories" are discussed critically (e.g. Koller 2012).

In this paper, we want to contribute to a synopsis of the theory of *Bildung* and theory of *transformative learning*. Both theories can be used as a background sheet for upcoming empirical studies of analyzing changing processes of individual perspectives. The specific theoretical angle the theory of *Bildung* (Koller 2012) introduces in order to describe the emergence of explicitly new figures of self-/world-relations and Mezirow's close up explanation of learning processes seems to be important elements in exploring individual changes in an educational context.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first explores the work of Koller (2012) and explains the conceptual framework, e.g. figuration of self-/world-relations and emergence of new figures. In the second part we apply specific theoretical modules of the theory of *Bildung* to the theory of transformative learning in order to figure out similarities and differences between both. Finally, the description of the design of our method and the results of our study will be presented.

At the outset of this paper it seems to be important to be explicit about essential terms that will appear in the following chapters. The terms *change*, *transformation* and *perspective* are significant for our study. *Change* illustrates our general term which describes the process of modification of the figures of self-/world relation. The term *transformation* stands for a specific type of modification. *Perspectives* represent the individuals' figurations of their self-world-relations. In the following statements we first want to outline the term perspective as the theory of *Bildung* explicates it (self-/world-relations). Then the term transformation in the aforesaid theory comes into account.



### **Structure of self-world relations**

The theory of *Bildung* (Koller 2012) is built up upon theoretical interests in the structure of the self, the world and the relations between them. In order to work out the implications of the theory of *Bildung* for the concept of transformative learning we have to get an idea about the structure of self-and-world-relations. Different theoretical approaches to “self-concept” (e.g. Bourdieu 2010, Straub 1998) have been around for many years. It will be worthwhile to take a look at the self and the world wherein it exists in order to come closer to the idea of *transformation*.

Due to an analytical division of the self and the world we can see that both concepts are two sides of one phenomenon. Each one can be seen as the backside of the other or even as the precondition of the other.

In order to find out about the self-/world-relation we first of all have to outline main aspects of Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* (Bourdieu 2010). This concept includes the interdependency of self- and world-relations. *Habitus* is the incorporated structure of dispositions which derive from the surrounding world (Koller 2012 p.23f), i.e. the physical, biological and social conditions of existence. Between the self and the world the *Habitus* operates as a connection of environmental conditions and individual action.

Individuals live in a structured environment (physically, linguistically, socially) of relatively stable and action-limiting dispositions (Bourdieu 2010, p. 98f). The structured environment impacts furthermore the individuals living in it. These structures can be seen as *structuring* those individuals and their concrete being-in-the-world. Bourdieu's Dispositions as incorporated environmental structures generate and organize the *sphere of possible actions* which individuals can factually realise. The world-relation of individuals is insofar not determined by the *Habitus*, but *limited*. The limitation does not prescribe singular possibilities for action; much more it provides options of an indefinite number of actions within a structured and a certain frame that excludes specific possibilities. The *Habitus*, i.e. the world-relation of an individual, describes the limited and at once the indefinite frame of possible actions.

By realizing certain actions, the individual experiences reactions and effects of its acting. This is a traditional thought of Symbolic Interactionism (e.g. Mead 1972, 2005). Self-consciousness arises through the reflecting mirror of the world. The *Habitus* which is by definition unconscious and which pre-forms the individual's attitude towards the world then implies a certain reflective process in which the individual experiences itself. The self is, as mentioned before, the complementary pole of the world. And the self is further more the pole in which experience takes place.

The concept of *Habitus* focusses on the collective preconditions which provide a limited and indefinite number of possible actions an individual can choose. But it doesn't take into account the individual arrangement of the self-/world-relations. Against this background of individual arrangement Koller speaks of *figures* (Koller 2012, p.16). The idiosyncratic decisions in order to realise certain actions are called *figures of self-/world-relation*. Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* remains at a theoretical level where the individual is only seen as bringing collective possibilities of action into reality. But it cannot explain the individual arrangement of this realization. There is always *one* possibility out of a sphere of limited and indefinite number of possible actions. The concept of *figuration* then meets the theoretical gap of this idiosyncrasy.

### **Transformation and the emergence of the *New***

As outlined above, the individual lives in a structured and structuring world wherein social action takes place. Bourdieu constitutes that the environmental structures do not determine individuals' social action, considerably more the individuals experience a *limitation* of their actions. The Habitus that derives from these limitations displays an enduring and stable character, so we can state that Habitus makes it difficult to change the ways we encounter and handle the world – and our self. Against this background the question arises of how transformational processes take place although we seek to meet a predictable world wherein we can stay the same. How and why can something *New* evolve or develop?

First approximations to the question of why transformations of the self-/world-relations do take place introduce the thought of *falsification* (Popper 1979). Self-/world-relations – which guide individuals through their day-to-day life – display a lack of accuracy to a certain given state. They therefore have to face that the explanations and their actions which derive from them do not fit into the current events. The hypothesis and theories about the world are therefore falsified and the individuals have to work out a new model with which they can face the world in order to achieve predictability (of the world) and sameness (of their selves). Individuals aim to achieve the state of enduring verification of their theories. Falsification forces them to reorganize either their selves or their theories of the world.

Kuhn's (2003) descriptions of the structure of scientific revolutions can be understood against this background of falsification. The *paradigm shift* takes place as a *revolution* of the old explanations of the world. Explicitly new paradigms result from this revolutionary processes. *Bildung* as a transformational process of self-/world-relations can then be seen as such a revolution. Kuhn's revolutionizing *discoveries* and Popper's *falsifications* present the theoretical guidelines along which transformation and the development of new self-/world-relations can be conceptualized.

Taking into account that individuals not only refer to scientifically organized and explicit theories about the world and their selves, we have to look at individuals in their *day-to-day-actions*. Social action can be characterized as taking place within a time-structured world (c.f. Oevermann 1991). There is always a *before* and an *after* of singular events. The world is structured *sequentially*. Therefore individuals have to keep up their living processes and their constitutionally future-oriented social actions in every single point of time. Individuals are permanently forced to realise actions. Similar to Bourdieu (2010) this *compulsion to act* is a relatively stable principle of meeting the world and its (constitutionally) unpredictable events. Individuals solve the fact of unpredictability and complexity by developing world-appropriate, individual rules of deciding how actions are to be realised. There is always a selection of *one* possibility out of an indefinite number of possibilities. This is what Oevermann calls *life praxis* (Koller 2012, p. 113). By this term Koller wants to describe the concrete individual regularities of deciding to realise certain actions. Transformation then is to be analyzed under these regularities. It is then possible to leave the rational level of theories by looking at the individual in its day-to-day-constitution.

*Transformation* in the theory of *Bildung* then goes beyond the concepts of falsification (Popper) and random discovery (Kuhn), although those thoughts are implicated in this theoretical perspective. The cause for transformation (and the development of new figures of self-/world-relation) still lies in the unforeseen disturbance of currently realised actions. The question of why transformation takes place can still be answered by falsification. Koller calls this phenomenon *crisis* (c.f. Koller 2012, p.115).

In the individual's day-to-day-life the before mentioned compulsion to act can be reformulated as a permanently given pressure of decision-making, resp. selecting actions out of an indefinite number of possibilities. This, as we saw, is the reason why individuals develop a *life praxis* (i.e. *concrete structuredness of a case*). Additionally those decisions *have to make sense*. They have to be socially and individually appropriate actions; appropriate to logical and rational actualities, social realities as well as individual narratives. Alongside the permanent pressure of decision-making there is a *reasoning-obligation* (Koller 2012, p.115) that puts pressure on the individual. A *life praxis* has worked out an own way of dealing with these conditions. Crisis then happens when the sequentially structured action faces an inhibition of its fragile balance between the pressure of *decision-making* and *reasoning-obligation*. An action then can not come to its anticipated end. But this is a paradox and actually life-threatening situation! This is a situation that cannot be. At a biological level this would mean the physical death of an individual if no solution can be found. At a level of meaningful action the paradoxical situation can be kept up a certain amount of time. But nevertheless a solution has to be found. When the contradictory unity of the acting-compulsion and the reasoning-obligation becomes fragile, a *crisis* of the individual's self-/world-relation evolves.

The crisis of the self-/world-relation enforces a search for new ways of dealing with the problem in question. These new ways can be found in the aforementioned *sphere of possibilities* out of which individuals 'choose' their actions. The sphere of possibilities implies ontogenetically experienced, socially appropriate as well as structurally possible solutions. The new figures of self-/world-relation then do not emerge out of nothing but are those possibilities which weren't realised before. Insofar the *New* is just at the backside (c.f. Oevermann 1991, p.319) of the old life praxis. When facing a crisis the individual searches for formerly dismissed possibilities in order to appropriately realise them. The characterization as *new* derives from the uncircumventable unpredictability of the concrete possibility which is chosen. It is a *prospectively emergent* phenomenon. And even more, the new figure affects, resp. transforms, the previous logic of a life praxis. The crucial point is, that the individual defines its whole previous life through those new glasses of self-/world-relation. This can be rephrased in Kierkegaard's aphorism: we have to live life prospectively (future-oriented), but understand it retrospectively (past-oriented).

As a consequence of a crisis, individuals are forced to take a look at the backside of their concrete life praxis, where an utopian potential is implied. The transformation of self-/world-relations into a new life praxis takes place within the three steps of facing an inhibition of a concrete action (crisis), producing inner pictures out of the sphere of possibilities and the elaboration and translation into appropriate ways of solving the crisis. From then on, when the new figure is realised, the reproductive logics follow this new principle until the next crisis (e.g. falsification).

The *New* is the selection of an objective possibility which was not realised in the old life praxis and it changes the reproductive regularities of a *concrete structuredness of a case*. It is not only an addition of a possibility to the old figure of self-/world-relation than a production of a new logic of meeting the world (and the self) which admittedly has always been there as a possibility within the limited (not determined) self-/world-relations of every-day-life.

### **Theory of Transformative Learning and Theory of *Bildung***

As we have seen before, the *theory of Bildung* focusses on the concrete self-/world relations and their transformation out of which new figures emerge and develop.

Those aspects can also be found in the theory of Jack Mezirow (1997). He uses different terms to describe transformation but, like Koller, aims at getting to know the specific phenomenon of transformation of meaning perspectives, which induces a deep structural shift in formerly basic assumptions about the world. Koller reserves the term *Bildung* for the description of such a basic transformation. With the explanations below we want to carve out the similarities and differences between both theories. Of course there are even more aspects which are worth a comparison. But for the current purposes we consider the following topics as the most significant ones in order to describe our work.

Peculiar to the German discussion about *Bildung* - and Koller wants to contribute to this discussion by reframing the traditional concept of *Bildung* - there is the differentiation of learning and *Bildung* (Koller 2012, . Learning is conceptualized as the process of acquiring new information about an issue whereas the corresponding frame remains unaffected. Theory of transformative learning entitles this phenomenon as instrumental learning. *Bildung* in contrast is a superior process of changing not only the content but also the frame, the modus operandi of an issue-related perspective. There occurs a transformation of the specific self-/world-relation. This is what Mezirow calls transformation of a meaning perspective.

When Koller speaks of self-/world-relations he refers to the structuredness of the world which in turn structures the self. However, Mezirow's *meaning perspectives* are indicators for a relation between the self and the world. They are formed by epistemic, sociolinguistic and psychological influences. This view can contribute to Koller's application of Bourdieu's concept of Habitus. Individuals' being-in-the-world and the dispositions which derive from it can be viewed under the differentiation by Mezirow. Self-/world-relations and the social actions concomitant with them are formed by epistemic, sociolinguistics and psychological factors.

The idiosyncratic figuration of the limited and indefinite possibilities of actions (i.e. the concrete structuredness of a case) is an aspect in Koller's theory that cannot be applied to Mezirow's theory from within. Here a difference can be found in both theories insofar as Koller displays a view on self-/world-relations (i.e. Mezirow's meaning perspectives) against the background of social action theory in a pragmatistic tradition. Koller's (and Oevermann's) *life praxis* enables to take a glance at the concrete regularities of reproduction of individuals' selection of actions which can be seen as a look in-depth at those relations which Mezirow defines as meaning perspectives. The figures of self-/world-relation can provide a deepening look at the concrete application of Mezirow's meaning perspectives.

The figures of self-/world-relation are not to be subsumed under the concept of meaning schemes. Much more the figures refer to the *life praxis* and involve the concrete principles of application and reproduction of action possibilities. They do not have to be rationally accessible to the corresponding individual. The individual has embodied this routine, the regularities are inherent in the life praxis, even the individual is not (yet) aware of it.

Koller's theory conceptualizes the individual process of transformation as an emergence of new principles of reproducing certain regularities of action. The new life praxis then is an emergent phenomenon insofar as the concrete direction of the transformative process is *eo ipso* unpredictable. The new self-/world-relation can be seen there as a *possible but previously not realised, i.e. un-/intentionally dismissed*, action. Koller tells us that the *New* does not emerge out of nothing, it rather has

always been a (dismissed) possibility which existed within the sphere of possibilities from the standpoint of the concrete life praxis. Mezirow however doesn't give special consideration to the theoretical explications of what the new meaning perspective is. Mezirow outlines the more profound and more integrative differentiation of meaning perspectives compared to the former ones as well as new ways of selecting other actions and decisions than before. The fact that the new meaning perspectives do not predictably develop from an initial point to a new one is not taken into the theoretical account of Mezirow's theory. Koller in turn describes the new figures of self-/world-relation as functioning in a new reproductive logic which was on the one hand not possible and even inconceivable in the old figuration but on the other hand works with the same (and maybe added) elements as the old one. The elements are arranged in a new nexus (i.e. concrete structuredness) which figure the self- and world-relation. The task of finding new ways in order to overcome a crisis, which Koller explicitly locates at a cognitive and conscious backside of reality (better: actuality), is to find in and between phase 5 (i.e. exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions) and 6 (i.e. planning of a course of action) in Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation (Mezirow 1997, p.143). But this theory conceptualizes a process of finding and realizing new options that is too rational. The perspective transformation implicitly emanates from a cognitive and conscious search for solutions out of a dilemma. Koller's production of inner pictures (dreaming, thinking etc.) and the sweeping for alternative ways in the sphere of possibilities is not highlighted in Mezirow's conception of transformation. Although Koller is not able to predict individuals' direction of transformation, he even works with this constitutional lack of clarity of the *New* by calling the process prospectively emergent but retrospectively reasonable.

A main aspect of the theory of transformative learning is the part *reflection* plays within fostering transformative learning. In Koller's theory the starting point is the life praxis and the latent regularities of the life praxis. Transformation of self-/world-relations occurs by the emergence of new figures. Whereas the theory of transformative learning appreciates the rational process of reflection, Koller takes into account the un-/subconscious ability to find solutions of crises by sweeping for alternatives in the sphere of formerly dismissed possibilities.

Theory of *Bildung* and theory of transformative learning are two different theoretical approaches to transformative processes of individuals. Mezirow's theory focusses on the changing process and the incremental phases against the background of perspective transformation. Koller conceptualizes the traditional concept of *Bildung* as a transformative process of self-/world-relations which is similar to Mezirow's perspective transformation. As analyzed above both theories apply slightly different perspectives. Koller aims to describe the idiosyncratic principles of social action and its transformation towards a new logic of the concrete structuredness. Mezirow explicates concrete phases of how the transformational process is elapsing. Insofar Mezirow's interest lies in the process within an initial point A that emerges in a transformed point B mainly through a reflectional work. Koller takes into account the concrete state of the initial point (i.e. concrete structuredness), sketches out the process of transformation as a sudden, un-/subconscious emergence of a new figuration of self-/world-relations and looks at the new figuration as functioning with an unpredicted but crisis-solving logic/regularity. The main terms that are worth a comparison against the background of our work were: self-/world-relations vs.

meaning perspectives, figures of self-/world-relation, the new figures vs. the transformed meaning perspective and the concept of transformation in both theories.

### **Method**

The documentary method (Bohnsack/Nentwig-Gesemann/Nohl, 2001) claims to figure out latent structures of a life praxis. Alongside the focus on what has been said, the documentary method looks at the specific way an individual has generated by producing a sequentially structured (written) document. It remains with the concrete case before cross-case comparison takes place and theoretical models are applied in order to classify the reconstructed scaffold of a case.

We implemented our study in a university class of Bachelor students. They had different foreknowledge on the issue of the class. Those students of educational science had to write essays on one out of three different topics at the beginning of the semester and again at the end. Methodically speaking, students wrote two protocols on specific topics. They differed in their implicit orientation towards personal experiences on the one hand and term-relation on the other hand. The students were invited to write down their ideas and attitudes, explicitly without applying scientific perspectives. So there was a chance to catch their spontaneous statements on those topics. In order to make transformations of self-/world-relations visible the students had to write another essay on the very same topics at the end of the semester. Seven students out of ten chose the topic on personal experiences, three wrote their statements on the conceptual one.

Our analysis of the written documents focused primarily on reconstructing the structure of each concrete case. The methodological perspective of the sequential structuredness of a case made it necessary to firstly entitle and formulate the contents objectivated in the sentences of interest. In the second step then the concrete praxis of an individual and its specific production of those sentences came into focus. These corresponding characteristic principles of both points in time had to be correlated in order to carve out structures that had changed. This case-specific comparative step made it possible to formulate characteristics in the transformation of the individual figurations. The last step was to collate those characteristics and formulate cross-case *types of changes*.

### **Results**

The cases we analyzed display different characteristics of their changing processes. Our results have to be seen as a first preliminary approach to the concept of transformation both in Koller's theory of *Bildung* and in Mezirow's theory of transformative learning.

Besides an identifiable stability of structures and regularities it was possible to turn out *three types of changes* within the documents: the *additional* type, the *substitutional* type and the *transformational* type.

The additional type - which Mezirow calls instrumental learning - keeps up with one characteristic structure both in the first and the second essay. There are visible additions of concepts and terms in order to explain attitudes and ideas about the specific topics. The frame of explanation stays the same when looking at latent figures of their relation to the topic. But there can be found additional aspects that are named on a content-specific, manifest level. But these aspects do not affect the logics of re-/producing their explanation frames.

The substitutional type can be subdivided into a *highlighting* one and a *replacing* one. The first subtype draws attention to different aspects of a case-specific totality of explanation. The latent figuration stays the same. In turn the replacing subtype brings differing aspects of explanation into play, but still stays the same in his latent re-/productive logics.

The transformative type then changes its logics of relating the self to the world. This is the type, Koller calls *Bildung* and Mezirow means by *transformation of meaning perspectives*. The logics of both essays differ in various dimensions. Just to name a few, the individuals identified themselves with a third person perspective - which at a first glance can also be defined as additive. But further more, this identification allowed new angles on a specific aspect. There is then a facilitation of explanation models which were not implicated in the old one. The figuration of such a transformed self-/world-relation could not be inferred out of the old statement. There is also a detachment of an inhibiting affect that obstructed access to this perspective. Although such aspects can be found as a seed in the old figuration, the capturing of a perspective by overcoming the inhibiting affect unleashes possibilities for the individual which could not have been predicted before.

Straight through all these changing processes a distinction between the person-related and the term-related topic has to be made which predetermined a certain implicit position of the individuals. The person-related topic prescribed a per se ego-syntonic framework. Within these framework all three types of change could be identified. The term-related topic induced an ego-distant frame which interestingly changed in the direction of bringing the world and the self, i.e. the term and a personal character within the explanations, closer to each other. The term-related topic didn't come to a transformation but a process where the self and the world consolidated could be made visible. Additive and substitutional changes occurred more numerous within the term-related frame.

### **Discussion**

In our study we explore *how* change in an educational setting presents itself and which three different types of changes can be found.

Based on the similar concepts of transformation within the theory of *Bildung* and the theory of transformative learning we analyzed students' essays by focussing on such changes. Our synopsis of both theories brought up several differing as well as similar aspects. How can our results be integrated into the theoretical synopsis?

Bringing together both theories a fruitful synopsis can be found by applying the concept of figures of self-/world-relation to the concept of meaning perspectives. Koller is able to take a deepening look at initial conditions of individuals. The concrete structuredness of a case implies latent variables that Mezirow's meaning perspectives cannot take into account explicitly. The concrete structuredness then has an effect on methodological angles from which a case is looked at.

The three types of change in the sense of modification of self-/world-relations can broaden the view on Koller's emergence of the *New*. There are patterns of change (addition, substitution, transformation) that are at first glance differing in their manifestation. But by taking into account the characteristic of person-relation and term-relation a further hypothesis can be formulated: Transformation of self-/world-relation is happening within a personal frame, i.e. in an ego-syntonic perspective. Further more, the ego-distant figuration displayed an approximation to the world. So because of the transformation occurring on the basis of ego-syntonic figurations and the reduction of ego-distance in the direction of finding the self in the term we can

hypothesize that there is a process of bringing together the self and the world cognitively and affectively before a transformation can occur at all. Neither Koller, nor Mezirow focus on this (hypothetical) process of approximation explicitly.

Koller, in contrast to Mezirow, acknowledges that the unpredictability of *Bildung*, i.e. of a transformation of self-/world-relation, is a central characteristic in his theory. Mezirow in turn does not ascribe higher theoretical significance to this issue. If we take a look at our three types of change it can be stated that both addition and substitution implicate more or less active processes of acquiring knowledge or acting options. On the contrary, transformation *just* occurs. Transformation happens with the taste of unpredictability. This has wide-ranging implications for pedagogical settings and professional educators. Knowledge transfer in such settings and transformative learning, resp. *Bildung*, have to face a non-rational factor which constitutionally defines pedagogical interactions.

Our study suggests that the theoretical concept of *Bildung* should be included in European education policy and discussions about learning theories in educational science. It can help to realize the value of the concept. Probably detailed discussions and empirical analyses of the concept of *Bildung* as a transformation of self-/world-relations has consequences for the constitution of educational settings in the future. It is also possible that our first results might extend the research perspectives on processes of transformation. Further research studies might explore in detail the process of change and its implications for educational settings.

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**ARTS AND TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING**



## Interpretation of Greek Drama for the Development of Critical Thinking

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### Abstract

This paper is a suggestion on the way Ancient Greek Literature, and Greek Drama in particular, can be used for the development of critical thinking. After the presentation of the theoretical framework, the description of a practical application follows, where the method of Kokkos 'Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience' is employed.

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Critical Thinking and Transformative Learning*

Critical thinking has proven substantial in contemporary society and it is now a recognized and necessary skill not only in the learning field, but also in the workplace environment. Various definitions and alternative terms have been given concerning the context of critical thinking, which do not need to be examined in this paper. What is important is the fact that, especially in the field of adult education, critical thinking forms the basic process through which the person is able to identify assumptions that frame their way of thinking and acting, to check the accuracy of these assumptions, to elaborate their ideas from different perspectives and, finally, to take informed action (Brookfield, 2012,p.1). Although critical thinking constitutes a basic quest both for childhood<sup>13</sup> and adulthood education, according to Mezirow (2000) a deep shift in our frame of reference through critical reflection<sup>14</sup> is to happen only during adulthood, thus adult education forms a separate and independent field from childhood education. Adults have structured through the process of their socialization, a frame of reference - assumptions, values, feelings, conditioned responses - that defines their life world. According to Mezirow (2000), frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences and try to explain them. Family, religion, the cultural, social, economic and educational systems indicate a person's notions and understandings according to which they think and act. Especially in the frame of Transformative Learning Theory, the person takes part into a process of examining, questioning and revising assumptions (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p.5).

These frames of reference change when the person understands that specific actions and thoughts do not work in anticipated way anymore. In order these frames of reference to be transformed into a more functional way, it is necessary to be critically reflected. This transformation, according to Mezirow (1991), happens during periods of crisis and is a necessary process in order for adults to overcome dysfunctional notions and consequently their frames of reference to become more *inclusive, critical, open, reflective* and *emotionally able to change*. The procedure of transformation consists of approximately ten stages in which critical reflection is necessary in order to pass through them.

As critical reflection can lead to Transformative Learning and to transformation of the same experience, it is important to examine how it could be supported by adults.

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<sup>13</sup> Several theorists refer to the need of enhancement of critical thinking and of an educational system and curriculum organized towards this direction. (Dewey, 1934 [1980]; Gardner,1990)

<sup>14</sup> Mezirow uses the term *critical reflection* instead of *critical thinking* (Mezirow, 1991)

Worth mentioning is the fact that in the field of adult education, and especially in the frame of Transformative Learning, the content of critical reflection is differentiated from what is identified by theorists as Paul (1993), Ennis and Norris (1989). According to their approaches critical reflection is restricted to maintain the mental rules for the achievement of a goal and has to conclude to certain action. However, Kegan (1994) argues that transformative learning does not necessarily occur while the learner is an adult, but it can be a part of the learning process that takes place at any age. More specifically, this happens, as already mentioned, because critical thinking is not something that characterizes only adults. A younger person is also able to think in a critical way as long as this is incorporated in the learning procedure. As a result, transformations can also take place during these ages, in a more limited way than during adulthood. So, critical thinking can be taught from the early learning stages as long as the school curriculum is organized towards this direction. Not only specific exercises but also the incorporation of reflective processes can contribute to a more critically thinking and creative student, participant, adult learner, and citizen. What needs to be born in mind is that these exercises and learning procedures, especially during the first stages of learning, have to correspond to each learner's different needs and abilities (Kegan, 2000, p.66).

#### *The use of art in Transformative Learning*

For the development of critical thinking various approaches have been offered. The role of art holds a prominent place among these approaches. Participants may be critically reflective of their assumptions through the arts of painting, drama, dance or by just reading a novel or a poem.

The importance of aesthetic experience was highlighted by Dewey in his book *Art as Experience* (1934 [1980]) where he refers to the role of imagination during the learning process. Art constitutes a basic challenge for thought and can cause a meeting between our old perceptions with our new ones, whereas aesthetic experience shall be considered as a fundamental element of growing imagination. Efland (2002) consents to the art's significance for the enhancement of critical thinking; our involvement with art gives us the opportunity to understand the social and cultural frame better. Moreover, he claims that the comprehension of art constitutes a complex activity and that each work of art is susceptible to multiple interpretations because of the symbolic forms contained in it.

The development of critical thinking through the use of art is also emphasized by Perkins in his book *The Intelligent Eye* (1994, p.3-5). In this work, Perkins refers both to the need of thinking in order to look at art and to the fact that looking at art leads to the development of a better thinker. A better thinker develops general commitments and strategies in order to give thinking more time. As a result, thinking becomes more board, adventurous and clear.

A special place in the literature review occupy the ideas of Marcuse as well as the ideas of Frankfurt's School theorists, Adorno and Horkheimer. What they emphasize on is the fact that art can cause critical thinking more than any other experience. Marcuse in his book *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978) refers to a revolutionary art that represents change and a breaking through the strong reality that finally leads to liberation. Art itself can't change the world but it can transform a person's consciousness. Adorno and Horkheimer refer to authentic art which enables as to detect the truth concerning the world and ourselves.

#### *The role of Literature in developing Critical Thinking*

Regarded as a form of art (Adorno, 1970[2000]), literature holds a special role during

the learning procedure. Many theorists have pointed out its importance for the enhancement of critical thinking and for a more active participation of the learner in the learning process. Mezirow claims that rational dialogue constitutes a basic element of transformative learning, while this dialogue can also be achieved through the reading of a text where the 'dialogue' takes place between the reader and the writer (Chasidou, 2009, p.100). The basic idea is that the text itself may become a stimulus of critical thinking if any dysfunctional assumptions emerge through the interaction with the context itself. Having identified these assumptions, the reader is then asked to confront them.

Towards this direction Greene in her book *Releasing the Imagination* (2000) refers to a more conventional vision of reality, characterized as *vision of normalized common reality*, which results in a one-dimensional understanding of the world.

Greene observes that so far in the field of education, although the participants are given numerous scientific sources, they become too familiar with them and therefore produce similar reactions. To be more specific, they include ideas that have been offered as heritage or tradition. Also, there could be approaches based on historical, cultural or economic accounts. In order to overcome this one-dimensional understanding of literature, imagination and its enrichment are essential. The role of imagination was also highlighted by one of the most important writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sartre (1947 [1971]) explains that his relationship with literature gave him the opportunity to unlock different ways of thinking.

The questioning of traditional ideas, images and dysfunctional assumptions through literature is probably the first indication of critical thinking. The reader sees himself through the hero and so recognizes his personal mistakes or dysfunctions. For example, Freire claims that the *aesthetic creativity* of writers influenced his thought during the first years of his work (Chasidou, 2009, p.101). Additionally, for Bruner (2004) a story is distinguished from a routine sequence of events by a *peripeteia*—a sudden reversal in circumstances. These stories give ideas of how to cope with errors and surprise in everyday life and as a result they illuminate the world by showing alternative ones. It is at this point where personal transformation can start and so the theory of Transformative Learning can be applied.

Unquestionably, the curriculum needs to be expanded and deepened, so the educator might find it helpful to turn to some works of imaginative literature where the metaphors, words or images will make the readers think afresh and in their own terms, thus going beyond where they are. In this way the readers no longer focus on what is commonly perceived or interpreted and ask themselves what they personally see and feel, in this way being personally present in their own learning process. Their attention is drawn to something where they can put their imagination in use and start wondering whether things might be different from what has traditionally been proposed (Greene, 2000, p.181). And this is a basic element of critical thinking if not critical thinking itself.

#### *Ancient Greek Drama and Critical Thinking*

Although literature is a recognised tool for enhancing or initiating critical thinking, not much attention has been drawn upon the importance of Ancient Greek Literature in this process. However, the significance of Classical Literature for educational purposes has been highlighted by scholars of various disciplines as it constitutes basic part in various educational curricula. In particular, Ancient Greek Drama has been widely explored for its multidimensional features in modern world. Apart from its lively character, provides the readers with ideas and emotions that transcend time. The

variety of subjects, for example a woman's place in society, the consequences of war, love and power, are of global interest and of all times and are given in a context that for someone who is new to this piece of literature is refreshing and challenging while for an experienced reader it can induce more emotion.

Initiating from these two points, the method proposed here aims to explore the potentials of the use of Ancient Greek Drama in the process of Transformative Learning.

In order to enrich critical thinking through the use of literature, we choose to use Ancient Greek Literature as it meets the criteria of the theorists of the Frankfurt School regarding the importance and authenticity of a piece of art (Adorno, 1970 [2000]):

- *Holistic Dimension*: Ancient Greek Literature and especially ancient Greek Drama is characterized by the dialectic relation between the content and the form. The use of symbols, the rhyme, the metre interact with the meanings and the ideas of the poet.
- The *truths* which are contained in the text express inner and deeper dimensions of human existence.
- *Unconventional texture*: the ideas expressed, the feelings, the content and the form oppose to stereotypes and one-dimensional approaches.

More specifically, Adorno in his book *Aesthetic Theory* (1970[2000]) uses the example of Attic tragedy where the spell of fate is dissolved and a self-reliant opinion is born. All these lead to the emancipation of society from the old stereotype according to which peoples' lives were totally dependent either on fate or on gods' will. Now the reader or the viewer is becoming more and more mature. Generally, the works of Euripides and Aeschylus are regarded by Adorno and Marcuse as being able to stimulate critical thinking.

*The Method 'Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience'*

By making use of all the above which regard the role that literature can play in enhancing critical thinking, we will then move on to organize an educational application which will involve Ancient Greek Literature and specifically Greek Drama. We will rely on an already formed and tested method introduced by Kokkos (2010) which is called *Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience* and which aims at enhancing critical thinking through making use of works of art. In the theoretical framework of this method it is mentioned that paintings, films and literature are regarded as forms of art which can be used for this purpose. However, the method has mainly made use of fine arts but the aforementioned investigation indicates that literature can be employed with the same potentials.

The method involves six stages which can be summarized in the following:

- The *first stage* refers to the determination of the need to critically examine stereotyped assumptions of the participants, concerning a special issue. This issue is usually of general interest, such as our attitude towards a foreigner.
- At the *second stage* the participants express their ideas on the issue under examination. The facilitator gives a general question in writing form, which the participants are asked to answer individually within 10-15 minutes. Then the answers are gathered to be used both during the third and sixth stage of the method.
- During the *third stage* and after the examination of the answers given during the second stage, the facilitator identifies the sub-issues that will be critically approached by the participants and the critical questions related to them.
- At the *fourth stage* of the method the facilitator identifies several pieces of art that will elaborate as stimuli for the examination of the sub-issues. In this stage, it is



of great importance that the selected pieces of art are related to the sub-issues. The artworks chosen by the facilitator could be paintings, sculpture, literature, poetry, theatre, cinema, dance, music.

- At the *fifth stage* the main goal of the procedure is a multidimensional approach of the sub-issues in order the participants to express and to hear as more different options as possible. It is in this part of the process where the artworks are the learning tool and the stimulus for the expression of feelings, experiences and thoughts.
- Finally, during the *sixth stage* the facilitator develops a synthesis of the ideas expressed and makes a comparison to the ones mentioned during the second stage of the method. It is in this stage that the facilitator will identify a potential differentiation to the ideas expressed in a more holistic and critical way.

### **Application**

Below the six stages of the method will be presented adapted to our aim which is the use of Ancient Greek Drama for the enhancement of critical thinking concerning the general issue of 'Individual identity in a foreign and hostile environment'. However, during the experiential workshop only the 5<sup>th</sup> stage of the method will be presented and participants will not have the opportunity to choose the artwork they prefer as the application is oriented exclusively to the use of Greek Drama.

At the *first stage* of the method we determine an issue for which the learners or the participants seem to have stereotypical ideas. In our case, as we meet the participants for the first time, we choose to process an issue that generally involves stereotypical ideas. The matter of the identity of a foreigner is one of these. Usually, the ideas expressed concerning the matter of identity have to do with the culture, the language, the religion, the social opportunities that the foreigner has in the host country and their status in comparison to the one of the hosts.

At the *second stage*, the participants are given a general question to answer concerning the issue under examination. This general question can be the following: 'Social Response to Immigration' and the answers may involve alternative options, concerning the culture, the social and economic status of the foreigner. They are asked to write their answer within ten to fifteen minutes using 60-80 words. Then the answers are presented to the facilitator, in order to save time, a few ideas are written down and a synthesis of them is developed.

During the *third stage* of the procedure, the facilitator studies the answers of the participants and based on them tries to create sub-issues from which critical questions will be formed, concerning the issue under examination. In our case, as the whole procedure lasts 90 minutes and basic aim is to see how Greek Drama can be used, the sub-issues and critical questions will not be identified.

The *fourth stage*, as it involves the identification of artworks, will also be omitted as the 'piece of art' under examination is already determined. However, alternative text of Ancient Greek Literature could be presented for the participants who would probably like to apply the method in the future focused on the issue of the identity of a foreigner.

During the *fifth stage* of the method, which is the one that is presented during the experiential workshop, one exercise is going to take place. However, another exercise is presented in this paper for the participants who would like to apply the method. Both exercises involve the reading of certain excerpts and afterwards answering to questions.

*1<sup>st</sup> Exercise*

The exercise is divided in four steps. The answers to the proposed questions<sup>15</sup> are noted by the facilitator on the board or a flip chart and are visible during the entire process. During the first two steps, participants express their individual thoughts.

During the other two, they work in small groups; following, each group presents its ideas in the plenary.

An excerpt of the Greek Drama *The Trojan Women* by Euripides is introduced to the group (See ANNEX1).

The general issue of the activity is ‘Social Response to Immigration’. Other issues which could be addressed: immigration, gender issues, isolation, social inclusion, human rights, encouraging the expression of feelings in adult education etc. Due to the fact that the participants are not familiar with Ancient Greek Drama, a context will be given to them together with the excerpts concerning the plot, the ideas of war, slavery, immigration in ancient Greece and generally providing all the necessary information for the elaboration of the text:

<p>FIRST STEP</p> <p><b>Observation questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe the scene?</li> <li>• Where and when could the scene be taking place?</li> <li>• What feelings does this scene create for you?</li> <li>• Try to describe the situation from the perspective of Hecuba.</li> </ul>
<p>SECOND STEP</p> <p><b>Analytical questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you relate to the character portrayed?</li> <li>• Could this scene be taking place in a contemporary society?</li> <li>• What obstacles would she come across today?</li> <li>• Why?</li> </ul>
<p>THIRD STEP</p> <p><b>Creative questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imagine a dialogue between a modern Hecuba and a European.</li> </ul>
<p>FOURTH STEP</p> <p><b>Reviewing the process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember the process.</li> <li>• Re-experience review and reflect on what you have discovered.</li> </ul>

*2nd Exercise:*

During this exercise the participants will form two groups. Each group will represent

<sup>15</sup> At the ARTiT, a Grundtvig Multilateral Project, there is a separate module concerning the use of Literature in Adult Education. More specifically, an example of using Literature is given adjusted to the method of A.Kokkos *Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience*. There, during the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase, the questions are separated into three categories: observational, analytical and creative. (www.artit.eu)

the two main parts of the drama. The excerpts given are from the Ancient Greek Drama *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus (See ANNEX2), the two groups will represent Cassandra and Clytaemnestra. Firstly, the two groups will be given certain parts of the text to read for a few minutes.

The answers to the proposed questions are noted by the facilitator on the board or a flip chart and are visible during the entire process. Again, during the first two steps, participants express their individual thoughts. During the other two, they work in small groups; following, each group presents its ideas in the plenary.

<p>FIRST STEP</p> <p><b>Observation questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe the scene?</li> <li>• Where and when could the scene be taking place?</li> <li>• What feelings does this scene create for you?</li> </ul>
<p>SECOND STEP</p> <p><b>Analytical questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What's the social status of Clytaemnestra /Cassandra?</li> <li>• How does the event of immigration affect Clytaemnestra /Cassandra?</li> <li>• What worries does immigration generate to Clytaemnestra /Cassandra?</li> <li>• How does Clytaemnestra's social status affect her attitude?</li> <li>• How does Cassandra's new status affect her attitude?</li> <li>• How does Cassandra's old status affect her attitude?</li> <li>• Do you find any special reaction from Clytaemnestra /Cassandra due to them being women in the particular society?</li> </ul>
<p>THIRD STEP</p> <p><b>Creative questions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue the dialogue between Clytaemnestra and Cassandra. What would they probably say to each other?</li> </ul>
<p>FOURTH STEP</p> <p><b>Reviewing the process</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember the process.</li> <li>• Re-experience review and reflect on what you have discovered.</li> </ul>

It is during the *sixth stage* where a comparison is made to the ideas expressed in the second stage. As the workshop lasts only 90' and the second stage of the method is not applied, this stage will be omitted too and only a brief synthesis may take place.

### Discussion

As the method mentioned above has not yet been applied, at this last part of this paper

a few worries will be expressed concerning the whole procedure. As our participants may not be familiar to Ancient Greek Drama, does this prevent them from taking part in it? Also, how much does the culture presented through ancient Greek drama and the poetic language used in it affect the participants? Would it be easier for them to watch the play rather than read it, and if so, will this no longer constitute a piece of art but become just a 'spectacle'? What size should the extracts given have in order to give all the necessary information for the procedure? Our aim is through the application of the method to answer all these questions and to take all the necessary feedback for a future use of Ancient Greek Drama for educational purposes in adult learning too.

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ANNEX 1

***The Trojan Women, Euripides***

HECUBA

[...]

You wretch, lift up your head, 110

Lift it up off the ground. Look up:

The Troy before you is no longer Troy,

The queen of Troy is queen no longer.

This is the changing fortune

You must bear. Bear it. Sail

With the hard current of the strait,

Sail with destiny,

Don't steer your life's prow back

Into the heaving waves;

Sail as you do, and have, and will

On the winds of chance. AIAI. AIAI. 120

What's not to mourn for in my misery—

My homeland gone, my children gone,

My husband? And you, too

Ancestral glory, all that opulence,

You added up to what? To nothing.

So why be silent now?

And yet, why not be silent? Why sing

A dirge? What good can it do?

Unlucky as I am, my limbs

So beaten down that they can only 130

Lie here on this hard bed crushed beneath

The crushing weight of destiny.

From head, from temple

Down to ribs, oh how my body

Longs to rock on waves of grief, the spine

Keel tilting side to side,

In rhythm to this long lament,

These tears, the only music

Left for the wretched, singing the song

Of troubles no one dances to. [...]

[...] Who made me, wretched Hecuba,

Founder against the reef she is.

Look where I've come to, where I sit,

Here by the tents of Agamemnon. 160

Look how bereft of home

I am, a slave, an old woman slave,

My head shaved to the very bone.

Troy burns, swallowed up in flame [...]

Let us keen for Troy, and like  
A mother bird for her fallen chicks, I'll cry  
The loudest, though my song is not the song  
I led once, honoring  
The gods, my footsteps beating out  
The frank praise of the dance while Priam,  
Smiling, leaned on his scepter [...]

[...] O god, O god, whose slave shall I be?  
Where in this wide world shall I live 210  
My life out, doing drudgework,  
Stooped, mechanical, a less-than  
Feeble token of the dead?  
Shall I be a guard, stationed at  
Their doors? A nursemaid to their children?  
I who was once the queen of Troy? [...]

[...] No, women, leave me lying where I've fallen.  
An unwanted kindness is no kindness at all.  
Is it any wonder I should faint  
From all I suffer and have suffered, and 550  
For all the suffering still to come? O gods!  
You useless allies in a time of need,  
And yet we're helpless not to call on them  
Whenever trouble strikes. (rises slowly)

But let me sing  
Of happier times one final time, so that 560  
My old good luck intensifies your pity  
For my bad luck now. I was a queen once,  
I married royalty, and I had royal sons,  
Supreme among all the Phrygians, sons such as

No Trojan or Greek or any other foreign 570  
Mother could ever brag of having. And I,  
I had to watch them, son by son, brought down  
By the Greek spear, and for every one of them  
I cut my hair in mourning at their tombs.

I wept for their father, Priam, not from hearing 580  
That he was butchered at the household altar  
I saw with my own eyes. I saw firsthand  
The city overrun and torched. I saw  
The hands of strangers take my daughters,  
Daughters I reared for husbands we would choose,  
But I raised them only to be stolen from me,  
Daughters, the daughters I'll never see again,  
Who'll never see their mother. I am no mother,  
But a slave, an old woman slave at that,  
And—miserable capstone to all my misery—  
Soon to be brought to Greece, where I'll be yoked  
To work no woman my age should have to do.  
What will I be, a servant at the door?

Keeper of the keys? I, the mother of Hector?  
What will I do? Bake bread, then lay my bent  
Back on the ground, far from the soft sheets  
Of my royal bed, my raw flesh dressed in rags,  
I who once wore luxurious robes? O god,  
How miserable I am. Look at the misery  
I've suffered and will go on suffering [...]

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CLYTAEMNESTRA:

Won't you come inside? I mean you, Cassandra.  
Zeus in all his mercy wants you to share some victory libations with the house. 1035  
The slaves are flocking.  
Come, lead them  
up to the altar of the god who guards our dearest treasures.  
Down from the chariot, this is no time for pride.  
Why even Heracles, they say, was sold into bondage long ago.  
he had to endure the bitter bread of slaves. [...]

[...] Unless she's like a swallow, possessed  
of her own barbaric song, strange, dark. 1050

I speak directly as I can - she must obey.  
[...] Do it *now* -I have no time to spend outside. Already  
the victims crowd the hearth, the Navelstone,  
to bless this day of joy I never hoped to see! -our victims waiting for the fire and  
the knife, and you, 1160  
if you want to taste our mystic rites, come now. If my words can't reach you -  
*Turning to the LEADER.*

Give her a sign,  
one of her exotic handsigns.

LEADER:

I think the stranger needs an interpreter, someone clear. She's like a wild creature,  
fresh caught. 1065  
She's mad, her evil genius murmuring in her ears.  
She comes from a city fresh caught.  
She must learn to take the cutting bridle before she foams her spirit off in blood -  
and that's the last I waste on her contempt!

LEADER:

Not I, I pity her. I will be gentle. 1070  
Come, poor thing. Leave the empty chariot  
Of your own free will try on the yoke of Fate.[...]

CASSANDRA:

[...] God of the long road, 1080  
Apollo Apollo my destroyer -you destroy me once, destroy me twice

LEADER:  
She's about to sense her own ordeal, I think. Slave that she is, the god lives on  
inside her.



CASSANDRA:

[...] The agony - O I am breaking! - Fate's so hard,  
and the pain that floods my voice is mine alone. Why have you brought me here, 1140  
tormented as I am?

Why, unless to die with him, why else?[...] 1160

[...] Ai, the wedding, wedding of Paris,  
death to the loved ones. Oh Scamander, 1170

you nursed my father... once at your banks I nursed and grew,  
and now at the banks of Acheron, the stream that carries sorrow, it seems I'll  
chant my prophecies too soon[...] 1310

[...]Oh the grief, the grief of the city  
ripped to oblivion. Oh the victims,  
the flocks my father burned at the wall,  
rich herds in flames... no cure for the doom that took the city after all, and I, her  
last ember, I go down with her. [...]

[...] I have seen my city faring as she fared,  
and those who took her, judged by the gods,  
faring as they fare. I must be brave.

It is my turn to die.

Approaching the doors. I address you as the Gates of Death.[...]

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Retrieved 15/06/2014.

## **Gender Awareness Training through the Arts: A conceptual framework to facilitate Change or/and Transformative Learning at Community work & life**

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### **Abstract**

This short paper sets out a proposal for a workshop approach that will support adult educators and/or social workers, in local communities, to think about the issue of gender inequality in their practice and in particular to address the “unbearable weight” that women carry when discriminated against or/and harassed.

### **Introduction**

The struggle for equality between women and men continues in many parts of the world. International Conferences and Human Rights Organisations have acknowledged that legislation and policies alone will not/cannot change mentalities. There is still a great need to focus efforts on changing the attitudes of women and men, girls and boys, through education about gender equality so that they can appreciate gender mainstreaming (Council of Europe [thereafter CofE], 2014). Gender awareness, in that sense, requires the appreciation of principles of liberatory education. When a majority of the world's citizens – women – are still oppressed, ‘we are never truly emancipated’.

It is stated in a large body of research (to cite only but a few: World Health Organization, 2012; UN Entity for Gender Equality, 2010; Barbieri *et al* 2007; Seaforth & Mwaniki, 2008) that gender discrimination continues to permeate all strands of life, cultural beliefs that subordinate women to men still exist even in developed countries, there is little if any recognition of the unequal division of labour between women and men, and most importantly, working women are more exposed to bullying and harassment in the workplace, to a more significant degree than their male counterparts (Mental Health Europe, 2011; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions [thereafter Eurofound], 2007).

The outcomes of such important – and ever growing – research indicate the strong links between persistent discrimination against women, the continuing existence of patriarchal institutions and, as a result, formation of unequal power relations between men and women that can often lead to violence against women (CofE, 2014; Kim & Motsei, 2002). A European project carried out in 2009-2010 and financed under the European Commission's *Daphne* programme stated ‘loud and clear’ that (among other recommendations) there is a need to *raise gender awareness so to combat violence against women at the workplace in all European countries and promote attitudes of zero tolerance*. Thus, we see that from The Beijing Platform for Action (1995), which has been endorsed by all EU Member States, not much progress has been made and, therefore, the need for *gender awareness training* does not seem like ‘pushing an open door’.

Gender awareness is “*the knowledge and understanding of the differences in roles and relations between women and men, especially in the workplace*” (Cambridge Business English Dictionary). This meaning leads to the recognition that life experiences,

expectations, and needs of women and men are different and that despite they involve inequity, they are subject to change (Tett, 2002; Thompson, 2000; hooks, 2000).

European Equality and Human Rights Commissions (and world-wide) denote that eradicating gender discrimination and gender violence, accordingly, requires the engagement of all citizens, working within an empowerment approach and educating, primarily, starting at the local level. However, most local governments are inherently patriarchal institutions (UN-HABITAT research, 2008) with no – or limited – provision for gender awareness training. Their structures and procedures are designed for and by men. These structures and processes do not take into account women's multiple responsibilities and their conflicting roles for that matter (Joseph, 2002). As a result of these and other factors, gender inequality persists and makes a dismal picture world-wide. Adult education, in that sense, particularly when is defined by the liberating principles of education (Freire, 1972), cannot ignore the lived experiences of this vast population, namely women. Even more, to provide an empowerment approach to education and to achieve *conscientization* – Freire's main learning goals – means to awaken one's own consciousness to have the power to transform reality (Freire, 1984).

This places adult education/adult learning, gender inequality and change in a wider conceptual framework which locates them within the gendered context of men's and women's lives. Therefore, these concepts require a gender analysis and gender theoretical perspective which also informs the workshop proposed herein. Why has this approach been adopted? The rest of this paper will

- explain the meaning and rationale of gender analysis in relation to persistent inequality, discrimination and violence against women
- outline the objectives and methodology of the proposed workshop/training
- consider the 'use' of art as a tool for gender awareness training
- discuss critical thinking and transformative learning with which is associated
- clarify how a gendered analysis accounts for recurring inequality, discrimination and violence against women
- outline the importance of locating our understanding, adult education responses, and efforts to eradicate discrimination and violence against women within a larger framework which acknowledges gender inequality and the spectrum of gendered violence.

### **Conceptual framework – gender analysis in relation to inequality, discrimination and violence against women**

Gender analysis is the systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and social relations in order to identify, understand and redress inequities based on gender (hooks, 1994). "*Gender analysis is a valuable descriptive and diagnostic tool for development planners and crucial to gender mainstreaming efforts[...]*a gender analysis takes a much closer look at the realities people face and requires a gender equality framework" (Joseph, 2002: 22). Gender inequality, in this framework, arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles and is a result of the persistent discrimination of one group of people to another. Historically, cultural traditions and dualistic belief systems have ascribed superior status to masculinity, and have developed diverse hierarchical gender orders which legitimise male authority and control over females and other subordinates. These have then been presented as the "natural order", rooted in our biology, or in "divine" intention. Such gender orders and regimes intersect with those constructed around race, class,

ethnicity, sexuality, disabilities and other aspects of identity in complex ways to foster and sustain inequality (Tett, 2002; Thompson, 2000; hooks, 2000).

Furthermore, it can be considered a causal factor of violence against women (Mental Health Europe, 2011; Eurofound, 2007; CofE, 2014). In this case, unless we take seriously the ways in which gender difference has been used to systematise subordination, we cannot get to grips with the normalised possibility of violence and abuse in gender relations. Domestic violence or violence at work are two areas where this phenomenon is mainly manifested.

Whilst aware of the many forms and contexts of violence in people's lives, women are more commonly victimised as the Eurofound (2007) and CofE (2014) have recorded from research on workplace bullying, violence and discrimination. While gender based violence affects both women and men, it disproportionately affects women and girls, reflecting their subordinate position in society. Different groups of men and women, as well as those who belong to sexual minorities, is also likely to be disproportionately affected by gender-based violence.

According to the same sources (ibid.) we cannot simply see violence as a random or individual act; it tells us much about the structures and health of our society. As such it is, in a sense, like an indicator illustrating the relationship of people to the state and the social values that we live by. It is often seen as a private issue which is outside of the remit of teaching and learning and working with. And yet figures would suggest that it is not an isolated experience affecting only a few people. Rather, it is a large-scale phenomenon and a 'well hidden problem' (Muro & Mein, 2010). As the UN Department of Public Information (2009) declares, up to 70 per cent of women experience violence in their lifetime, such as the UN General Assembly (2006, p. 42) reported that "between 40 and 50 per cent of women in European Union countries experience unwanted sexual advances, physical contact or other forms of harassment at work" and this cannot – must not – leave us without any action to correct it. Since attribution of 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics is based on norms and values which are deeply woven into the fabric of our relationships, families, communities and societies, then a 'transformation' of these attitudes is needed.

### **Gender Awareness Training through the Arts**

The workshop proposed herein makes an effort to incorporate *critical thinking through aesthetic experience* (Adorno, 1997/2012; Gardner, 1990; Perkins, 2009; Kokkos, 2010) that potentially enables a contextualised and nuanced understanding of the dynamics, process and meanings of women's discrimination and abuse at the workplace, recognised as a purposeful pattern of behaviours, rather than a series of mere incidents/acts. A significant body of studies (Kim & Motsei, 2002; *Daphne Project*, 2007-2013) have indicated that most women do not even recognize their own harassment – moral, psychological or other – and bullying, or identify them as insignificant routine. Even more, few, if any, professionals have received any kind of training on the issue of violence against women and of appropriate responses to it.

The main *objective* of the workshop is, then, twofold: a) to enable educators/facilitators/social workers to integrate gender concerns in their projects and actions - which links gender analysis and critical education & learning - in a European perspective, and b) to inform/insert/explain key concepts regarding gender violence. Its main *aims* are to prompt participants' awareness of challenges within their field of action, and to develop approaches and novel tools needed for critical adult education. The *methodology* of the session will be *training through the arts*, works of visual artists in particular, that could help us be aware of the challenges raised by gender

concerns. Within this framework, a feminist reading of education – informal or non-formal – can be liberatory in so far as the promotion of gender awareness training can help us be part of a system to ending oppression and violence against women (hooks, 2000, p. 26), aiming at women's empowerment and abolishment of negative traditional gender stereotypes and so contributing to positive transformative processes for societies.

According to European/International Organisations/Committees like the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (2007), CEDAW (2010), WHO (2009), Eurofound, (2007) to mention only but a few, "*harassment and violence at work is any unacceptable behaviour by one or more individuals and can take many different forms, some of which may be more easily identified than others [...] harassment and violence may be carried out by one or more managers or workers, with the purpose or effect of violating a manager's or worker's dignity, affecting his/her health and/or creating a hostile work environment.*"

Activists should seek to encourage women to speak out against violence. Society has to make perpetrators responsible for their actions and all public/local bodies must incorporate in their policies a strategy for educating and constantly informing workers/employees, the whole community, in order to prevent and consequently to combat such phenomena.

### **Discussion about the 'use' of art in relation to gender awareness and transformative learning**

Visual art has been used throughout time to introduce a wide variety of ideas and raise awareness. Paul Ricoeur, a worldwide distinguished philosopher, said, "*aesthetic expression - the arts offer us models for the redescription of the world [...] they attach us to others, to our history, and to ourselves by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, and even advice on what we might do with our lives*" (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 105). In that sense, to work with the elements of painting, for example, help raise our consciousness towards important critical matters of human life. Moreover, concepts of art resonate with important precepts such as embodiment, contextualization, performativity and reversibility. In particular, the theme of *embodiment* is central for feminist scholars such as Luce Irigaray (1985) and, accordingly, *performativity* for Judith Butler (1990, 1993), who see the construction of gender within "*regulative discourses*" (a term borrowed from Michel Foucault, 1975, p. 222). In this respect, all the manifestations of "*micro-power*" in our society, like the unequal power relations between men and women, are used to coercing subjects to perform specific actions. Yet, there is always a space to resist, to transform those "*disciplinary techniques*" involved in "*regulative discourses*" (Foucault, 1975), since gender "*in its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status*" (Butler, 1988, p. 520).

Aesthetic expression is a metaphorical process that transforms raw experience into another kind of experience that enlarges our singular life with the life of others. Painting bears that experience to us in the presence of new creative meaning (Ricoeur, 1991). It could be argued that this metaphorical process has the potential to transform our views or the way we "*name the world, to change it*" as Freire (1984, p. 76) noted. Painting offers polygraphy, multiple imaginings and multiple readings that subvert expectations implicit in the painting's title and bears us towards the Ricoeurian polysémie variation essential to the "*ruins of literal sense*" (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 211) that give us a new metaphoric utterance which opens possibilities to see and think more, or as bell hooks (2006) put it that the function of art is to do more than tell it like

it is - it's to imagine what is possible. Thus, these works of art become a space for freedom where women free of authority, free of saying the 'wrong' things, empowered from learning, un-learning, re-learning their realities can potentially change them. This line of thought brings us into spaces of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990; 1991a; 1991b; 2000), a concept which has provoked controversy, with the main counter position being that transformative learning theory places too much emphasis on the individual and overlooks the social dimension (Taylor, Tisdell & Hanley, 2000). In particular, feminist scholars highlighted the lack (or inadequate) analysis of how systems of power and privilege shape learning (Tisdell, 1998, Sattler, 2000). Although Mezirow's (1978) empirical work started with women returning to college, his consideration was not focusing on women and this "is problematic for a number of reasons" (English & Irving, 2012, pp. 305-312), not the least that gender had faded from the adult education literature (English & Irving, 2007). Though this brief critique cannot do justice to Mezirow's work – after all, in Mezirow's words (1991a), it is a theory in progress – there is clearly something at stake in retaining some of the dimensions of transformative learning in order to explain/maintain/facilitate gender awareness that holds the necessity of compounding change of society as well as change of individual's mind. In particular, when the focus is on the issue of women's discrimination and abuse then the structures of the society are equally important, if not more so, to the individuals' intentional wrongdoing.

*"Violence against women is not the result of random, individual acts of misconduct, but rather is deeply rooted in structural relationships of inequality between women and men [...] It cuts across both the public and the private spheres."*

(UN Secretary General's Report, 2006).

This means to recognise that gender is a basic organising principle for relationships, institutions, cultures, and for the distribution of resources (including wealth, status and power) in human societies (Joseph, 2002). Human beings are socialised according to the array of gendered expectations and roles, which not only create and maintain difference between women and men, but also tend to assign unequal value and privilege to men and women. To say that abuse is gender-based is simply to recognise that the socially attributed norms, roles and expectations of masculinity and femininity which affect social relationships, family and/or societal structures are integral to the use and experience of violence and abuse, whether perpetrated by men or by women (Kim & Motsei, 2002).

### **Identifying violence through *Visible Thinking* and the arts**

The workshop proposed herein will present images of visual artworks to offer an opportunity to see, to fully understand an insult in relation to gender. Such artwork could be i.e. a) Marina Abramovic's *Freeing the Voice* (1975), a black and white photograph that represents the pain, the brutality, the anguish, the danger, life at the edge. Abramovic is a seminal Serbian artist well known for her live performances while 'talking' about the suffering female body; therefore, many of her works offer the opportunity to discuss the concerns emerging from within the present discussion; b) Frida Kahlo's *Self-Portrait (Diego on My Mind)* (1943), considered by André Breton (Kahlo, 1995), "like a ribbon wrapped around a bomb", allows us, also, to see the powerful mechanisms of control over the female body and soul. The discussion will prompt questions like, i.e.:

*How do I understand that the person illustrated has suffered some type of violence?*

*Does this picture make me feel uncomfortable? Why?*

*What kind of stereotypes are they displayed?*

*Does this image violate my dignity? On what grounds?*

*What could/should I change to reverse the situation in a real life context?*

The value of using artwork in a process of critical reflection is inherent in a different perception of learning, that of empowering adult learners, rather than providing “banking education” (Freire, 1996, p. 58) that only supports the reproduction of dominant values. In the same line of thought, Brookfield (2000), Gardner (1990) and Perkins (1994) speak of the use of art in critical reflection by assigning to it a culture of thinking that is of great value not only to education but to life itself, particularly when thinking become *visible*.

Hence, the workshop method will be that of *Visible Thinking* (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2008), borrowed from Project Zero (Gardner, 2013; Perkins, 1994), originated at the School of Education at Harvard. It is the ‘product’ of a number of years of research concerning how children and adults learn in and through the arts (Goodman, Perkins & Gardner, 1972). The central idea of *Visible Thinking* is very simple: *making thinking visible* through inquiry. It applies to *learning to think*, which also includes *learning to learn* with key-goals: deeper understanding of content, greater motivation to learn, development of thinking/learning abilities, development of learner’s attitude towards thinking and learning and alertness to opportunities for thinking & learning and, finally, turn the classroom of learners to a community of enthusiastically engaged thinkers and learners (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2008; Gardner, 2013).

To achieve these goals, *Visible Thinking* involves several practices and resources, with a number of “thinking routines” for exploring ideas around whatever topics are important, whilst built in abstract ideas like democracy, liberty (or inequality and discrimination for that matter). *Visible Thinking* emphasizes several ways of making learners’ thinking visible to themselves and one another, so that they can improve it. “Thinking routines” use mini-strategies that are a small set of questions or a short sequence of steps that can be used across various grade levels and content. Each routine targets a different type of thinking, in example, by reading a poem or a novel or looking at a photograph about Africa, learners can reflect on what is happening now (*understand*), but also they can follow a routine to elicit thoughts on how the role of women have changed from past to the present day (*inquire*). Inquiring and understanding correspond to a ‘working group’ process where different viewpoints expressed in a circle to help learners explore diverse ideas or perspectives, i.e. of characters within the novel or of the situation depicted in a photo or painting. Both of these routines aim at a perspective discussion/thinking that is central to the idea of *critical thinking*. Routines are nothing more than patterns of action that can be integrated and used in a variety of contexts. Thinking becomes visible as these different viewpoints are expressed, documented, discussed and reflected upon.

While that approach has been extensively applied in children, the Scientific Coordinator of the ARTiT Grundtvig project, Pr. Alexis Kokkos, has made clear that methods which develop creativity in the field of adult education are not widely spread across Europe, thus the ARTiT project for adult learners was born to enrich the art-based learning by including Fine Arts, Cinema, Literature and Music, systematically, in the educational process (Kokkos, 2010, 2013; The ARTiT, 2012). The workshop proposed herein draws on the ARTiT project tested techniques – observation of works of art to support adult learners’ creativity and critical thinking – but is also influenced by the “thinking routines” of *Visible Thinking*.

### Synopsis

Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and perhaps the most pervasive. It stems from within unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men, and knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace and, regrettably, review of relevant bibliography has shown that much need to be done to achieve real equality.

*Gender awareness training through the arts* enables us to see and 'to name the problem', to direct our thinking and to inform a vision for transformation, at all levels of social interaction, from dominant to egalitarian masculinity, for the benefit of women, children and men, and the wellbeing of our communities. Gender awareness can be achieved by gender analysis that recognizes that:

- violence is endemic and functional within human interactions and structures,
- there are many expressions of violence which are considered normal, legitimate and even honourable,
- violent practices and behaviours - from interpersonal to international levels, in families, communities and in wars - are gendered,
- men are statistically and overwhelmingly the main perpetrators of violence against other men and against women but by no means all men are violent or abusive,
- the meaning, use and consequences of violence by men and by women is not equivalent and cannot be understood in isolation but as an expression of wider social factors.

Gender analysis indicates that, even though we may not be aware of it, the experience of unequal power relations is still present in the lives of many adult women whom we teach or who work with us. As a result of this, high incidences of violence against women occur more frequently than ever. It is a phenomenon that often remains 'invisible', 'untold', 'unaccounted for' and something that educators (and/or employees/workers in any sector) feel uncomfortable acknowledging and engaging with. Even more, a feminist reading of ending violence against women is needed "to live lives where we love justice, where we can live in peace" (hooks, 2000, p. 118). The proposal of the present work referred to the 'power' that a work of art carries within so people can realise difficult and 'annoying' problems. By using the arts, perceptions of abuse and discrimination more easily conveyed and therefore can be tackled. Although the principal idea of this process is informed by critical consciousness raising, this work is aware that different positionalities of emancipatory adult educators tend to implement the theoretical frames of *critical thinking* and/or *transformative learning* in quite different ways, in practice (Taylor, Tisdell & Hanley, 2000). Thus, *rationality*, the basis for fostering *critical consciousness*, as seen by Mezirow, is a pretty limited perspective of the process of change, as research shows (Taylor, 1997). Different experiences, emotions, and other factors like race, gender, class, religion (and other) intersect and play an important role to understanding *change or transformation*, differently.

In trying to make positionality visible here, emancipatory adult education, gender and educational biography, have been areas of my research, over many years, in diverse contexts. My roots are in the modernist tradition traversing and transgressing, in the course of time, to more poststructuralist insights to the extent that the understanding of our lives is perceived as structured by a number of forces conducing to ambiguities



and ambivalent perceptions of “reality”. In particular, influenced by the broader turn to life-history research when informed by feminist epistemology, I have tried to highlight the political (*political* as in Hanisch, 1970 – in the broad sense of the word) and social value of learning. With that said, learning that can empower people’s lives should inspire us to think deeply about our own choices, sometimes the deprivation of choices but even then, still, holds the possibility of resistance. Recreating stories of oppression, though, from diverse positions and perspectives, through art, is also creating spaces for liberation and mutual understanding in which women find the space to create new imaginings, new visions of their world and, sometimes, *help change it.*-

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**Aesthetic Experience and Transformative Learning  
Selecting Works of Art for designing a Transformative Learning  
process in Vocational Training**

[A case from the National Bank of Greece S.A. training environment]

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**Abstract**

The workshop aims at exposing participants to educational use of aesthetic experience through selected works of art in order to develop critical thinking and demonstrating the method's compatibility to transformative learning theory and training practice within an organisation, exploiting results that emanated from the National Bank of Greece S.A.

**Organisational Change and Human Resources**

In today's business world that is characterised by constant and drastic changes, organisations are trying to drive their managers and staff towards open-mindedness, thinking outside the box, having a helicopter view, in short all these interesting ways of describing situations in which people are able to analyse, evaluate and synthesise a specific situation or phenomenon without prejudices in order to reach the optimal course of action, or solution to the given problem.

Organisations have tried for a very long time to select their members –employees and managers – according to the model their top management team believes is best suited in order to achieve their stated goals and function in an efficient and effective way. The individual – organisation compatibility issue is of a major importance, as it is ensuring the problem free operations and the continuous process towards the realisation of the vision. Apart from the selection process that acts as a filter in providing organisations with the desired personnel, there is a need for constant fine tuning with changes that occur in the general environment. As Peter Drucker (2008) puts it: "... we face an Age of Discontinuity in world economy and technology ... The one thing that is certain so far is that it will be a period of change – in technology and in economic policy, in industry structures and in economic theory, in the knowledge needed to govern and to manage, and in economic issues..." .

The need to face a continuously changing external business environment has actually led to two distinct pathways regarding Human Resources. Firstly, as mentioned above, the organisation sets selection criteria that ensure hiring persons with the appropriate set of values and way of thinking and secondly, uses the training and development function in order to fine tune and maintain the appropriate momentum that will enable their staff to cope successfully with change. This belief leads trainers (educators), the designers of an Organisation's training and development programmes to evaluate the training needs and set the training programmes' targets which are categorised in the fields of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

But nowadays, rapid, constant and dramatic changes are happening and from our experience in the organizational context we realize that training should not only aim to fine tune personnel to a solid set of knowledge, skills and attitudes but actually

empower them to transform the organisational way of perceiving, thinking and deciding. As a result, trainers have to design programmes in a way that create the appropriate conditions for their trainees to review, analyse, evaluate, question and criticise their beliefs and assumptions, in order to obtain a clear picture and understanding of the constantly changing environment within which they function and thus decide which is the appropriate action to be taken depending on each situation.

### **Critical thinking and transformative learning in Organisations**

A substantial part of learning theorists agree that reflection, is a core element of adult learning, transformation, empowerment and professional growth (Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013). Reflecting /Critical thinking is about soliciting and identifying assumptions which after being revealed, questioned, evaluated and reviewed in a training situation will probably facilitate the exploration of alternative perspectives and through them, produce informed actions as outcome of the learning process. As Raelin (2001) puts it “we need managers who can inspire reflection to the extent of generating new ways of coping with change”. As a trainer, one has to take a closer look of trainees’ assumptions, since it is necessary to identify them accurately and take them into consideration during the designing phase of the programme, as well as facilitate trainees to delve on them.

Brookfield (2013) identifies three types of assumptions in the “Teaching for Critical Thinking”. The “causal” ones, that refer to how the world functions based on the cause – effect relationship and thus used mainly for interpretation of past phenomena and prognosis of future situations. The “prescriptive” ones, that refer to how the world functions based on the image that individuals have regarding how things “should be” or “should be done” by elaborating on the proper behaviour for a specific role, i.e. which would be the proper reaction of an effective manager facing a specific situation. Lastly, the “paradigmatic” assumptions which are actually forming a totality of reference points and values that at the end of the day dictate the way the individual actually interprets the world. The author points out the fact that most of us are not aware of such a network of reference points and are quite astonished at its discovery. Brookfield of course is elaborating on the case of teachers and students while making crystal clear the necessity for teachers to model the process for their students. It is quite evident though that the circumstances of vocational training with the trainer – facilitator on the one hand and the trainees - organisational members on the other, are quite similar if not the same.

Thus Critical Thinking becomes the tool to be used, by trainers and trainees, in the organisational context in order to enable managers and staff realise the dramatically changing environment in which they actually function, the reasons their thoughts or reactions are hardwired in a specific way, the assumptions they carry and should probable drop, by taking advantage of the acquisition of new knowledge, skills and behaviours that are offered to them through vocational training.

Mezirow & Associates (1990) state that: “Transformative learning involves a particular function of reflection: reassessing the presuppositions on which our beliefs are based and acting on insights derived from the transformed meaning perspective that results from such reassessments”, which leads to the broader conclusion that in the cases of learners who do not manage to reach insights concerning their assumptions, no transformation can possibly take place and thus one cannot discuss about a transformative learning situation. In another paper Mezirow (1998, p.191) elaborates on the notion that transformative learning, through the critical reflection of

one's own assumptions, is actually effecting transformations in the frames of reference of the learner within his scope of awareness.

As Aronowitz (1998), Professor of Sociology and Cultural Studies at City University of New York, writes in the Introduction of P. Freire's "Pedagogy of Freedom": "people cannot raise themselves to bid for power unless their curiosity has been aroused to ask the hard questions : "why", as well as "what". To achieve transformative learning two elements are necessary, as Mezirow (2008, p.28) puts it: a) critical reflection, self-reflection by assessing the sources, the nature and the consequences of our habits of mind and b) participation in a free and full way in the discourse to validate the best reflective judgement.

While designing training programmes within the National Bank of Greece S.A., in our effort to reach the desired learning outcome, guiding learners to overcome assumptions while becoming more receptive to change and able in managing its issues, for the organisation, we have applied the "Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience" method, as is was presented by Alexis Kokkos (2009) in his academic work and adult teaching practice.

We believed the method to be suitable in serving our fundamental training goal which was for learners to develop critical thinking by overcoming assumptions while becoming more receptive to change and able to manage it, during the organisation's everyday life, because:

- It belongs to the transformative learning theoretical framework and namely on Mezirow's theory, having as a basic learning element the motivation of the trainees' critical thinking in a way that allows them to re-evaluate their assumptions
- It uses works of art which, as observed during our training practice, did indeed function as triggers in trainee participation
- It involves trainees in several stages of the design and implementation

### **"Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience" method. Fundamentals, definitions**

The method:

1. uses mainly Perkins' (1994) technique on the systematic exploration of works of art, or other techniques (e.g. Visible and Artful Thinking) based on the same principals. The technique of D. Perkins is an extended and well-articulated idea about how we can observe a work of art. It consists of four phases:
  1. Time for observation
  2. Open and adventurous observation
  3. Detailed and profound observation
  4. Reviewing the process.

However, there are other simpler, flexible alternative approaches for critically observing works of art. Several of them are included in Projects Visible Thinking (<http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org>) and Artful Thinking (<http://www.pzartfulthinking.org>). Both Projects are linked to Harvard University Project Zero. Visible Thinking emphasises several ways of making learners' thinking, visible to themselves and one another, so that they can improve it and Artful Thinking helps the educator to use works of art in ways that strengthen learner thinking and learning. Both projects are dealing with "learning routines". Routines are simple structures, a set of questions for example, that can be used across various content concerning discussion about works of art, in order to extend and deepen learners' thinking. Almost all the learning routines from Visible and Artful Thinking can be

applied for observing a work of art. Several of them have been used in adult education successfully, e.g.:

- “What Makes You Say That?”: Interpretation with justification routine (Visible Thinking, Artful Thinking)
- “Think, Puzzle, Explore”: A routine that sets the stage for deeper inquiry (Visible Thinking, Artful Thinking)
- “See, Think, Wonder”: A routine for exploring works of art and other interesting things (Visible Thinking, Artful Thinking)
- “Circle of Viewpoints”: A routine for exploring diverse perspectives (Visible Thinking)

2. cultivates critical thinking in a systematic way using critical questions.

The critical question's role is to actually provoke the evaluation and questioning of an assumption, in order to reassess one's belief on the specific subject.

Mezirow (1998) has stated that: “Critical self- reflection of an assumption involves critique of a premise upon which the learner has defined a problem - e.g. “a woman's place is in the home”, so I must deny myself a career that I would love”. The above mentioned problem, can also be expressed as a question addressed to the learner, who in her/his turn has to answer while participating in a training action. The process of reaching the answer demands the use of critical thinking by reflecting on the learners' assumptions. Trainees can actually process this critical question either on an individual or in a group basis. Following the above mentioned example concerning the assumption of “a woman's place is in the home”, critical questions which could be formulated and addressed to all the learners participating in the specific training action, could be:

- How is a woman's career planning affected by the notion that her place is in the home?
- Does the notion of “a woman's place is in the home” facilitate or hinder career choices for women? In what way?
- Does being a woman means that I cannot follow the career I love because my place is in the home?

Critical questions have to be expressed in a way that will be inviting dialogue within a group, if the trainer wishes to involve the trainees in team formations, or self-questioning if trainees are to work individually. To ensure these two elements the trainer is obliged to formulate them in a way that the answer is rather argument inviting than apparent. Using the “critical question” tool the trainer can elicit the answer which is actually the core message to be received by the trainees.

There are many theoretical approaches and many definitions concerning critical thinking, works of art and aesthetic experience. For the context of our application we adopt the following ones, on which the method is based:

*Critical Thinking* is defined as the reflective way of thinking that examines the rationality of thoughts and involves the validation and reformulation of stereotypes taken for granted, assumptions.

*Works of art* are defined as a) artefacts, b) created intentionally in order to serve a certain cultural role representing specific meaning, and c) open to interpretation (Lafrenz, 2013). This openness derives from the fact that art is “Creation that express their makers' views of the world, tell the stories of their lives, or describe and question their realities”. (Davis, 2008, p. 118)

*Aesthetic Experience* is defined as the systematic exploration of works of art. It contributes by unearthing the integrated knowledge, encompassing critically, reflective and affective dimensions of learning. This kind of experience enlarges the

perspectives for approaching the processes and the phenomena, for “seeing” them from a different point of view, for deepening aspects beyond appearance, and for better understanding causal conditionings (Kokkos, 2010).

The “Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience” method:

- Derives from the work of scholars like Dewey, Efland, Eisner, Gardner, Perkins, Freire as well as the theorists of transformative learning theory, who have portrayed the importance of aesthetic experience in the development of cognitive but also affective and imaginative sides of thought processes.
- Considers of the utmost importance the effort of adult educators to create, in every possible way, a learning environment which will allow all learners to be familiarised with works of art and have an emotional, intellectual and critical access to their understanding.

Based on these principles and definitions “Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience” method is a detailed structured procedure including six stages (Kokkos, A. 2010)

*First stage: Determination of the need to examine a topic critically and creatively*

The first stage refers to the educator investigation regarding the need for critical and creative examination of some of the participants' taken for granted beliefs on a specific topic. Phases:

- a. The reason for the initiation of the investigation of educational needs can occur at the beginning or during a training programme, when the educator assumes or somehow finds out that participants consider a belief as granted and proper, while in reality it represents a stereotype for them or for the whole society.
- b. The educator coordinates a discussion aiming to make participants realise that they are dealing with a misleading dilemma. At the end of the debate, the educator asks if they want to reflect on this topic critically and creatively in future meetings. An affirmative answer is the beginning of a process of critical and creative reflection. At this point, the educator may ask participants to express their thoughts and feelings.

*Optionally*, works of art can be used for icebreaking, in order to create an open, relaxed climate, favourable to the achievement of learning processes.

*Second stage: Participants' ideas expression on the specific topic*

- a. The aim is to formulate opinions regarding the topic under consideration. *The educator asks everyone to reply in writing to some open questions.* This is done in order to obtain the material needed to formulate a strategy for the development of critical and creative thinking on the topic. In addition, the recording of the original ideas will serve later during the process's last step, at which point they will be compared to the views that originated from the process.
- b. The educator proposes to discuss the ideas in small groups and then in plenary. The objective is for the larger group to prioritise the viewpoints and to synthetically formulate a proposal of the sub-topics that should be examined.

*Third stage: Sub-topics that should be approached identification*

The educator, after studying the participants' proposal, negotiates with them about which sub-topics will be eventually put under examination and their subsequent order.

*Fourth stage: Works of art identification*

The educator, in cooperation with the group, identifies numerous pieces of all forms



of art, which could serve as triggers for the elaboration of the various elements of the first subtopic to be examined. The meanings of the works of art must be related to the subject of the sub-topic. There are five options (a, b, c, d, e) for the learners' participation in the process of selecting works of art.

- a. Educators suggest to participants a variety of works of art suitable for critical reflection and the trainees identify and choose the works of art they prefer and the final order in which they will approach them.
- b. Educators suggest the sources in which the learners can locate the works of art necessary to study different issues and the trainees identify and choose the works of art they prefer.
- c. Educators provide participants with criteria for the search and selection of works of art.
- d. Participants propose directly the works of art they prefer, but then discuss with the educators deciding the works of art to be chosen.
- e. Combination of the options a-d.

In conclusion, the final opinion on the selection of works of art and their meaning does not belong exclusively to educators or participants. A dialogue takes place, examining all the arguments, the advantages and disadvantages.

#### *Fifth stage: Works of art elaboration*

At this stage, the educator coordinates a process during which – through the systematic exploration of chosen works of art – critical and creative examination of the chosen subtopic is conducted. Phases:

- a. First the educator helps to identify the participants' assumptions around this subtopic.
- b. The interrelated meanings deriving from the works of art under consideration are explored. Out of the ideas arising from observation, the group finds reasons to expand the critical treatment of the various components of the sub-topic.
- c. The remaining works of art are then observed consecutively, in the same way.

Various ways for the exploration of artwork are proposed (A detailed description can be found and downloaded in <http://artit.eu/en>):

- Perkins' technique for fine arts
- ARTiT's technique for films, for literature or for music, based on Perkins' technique
- Visible and Artful Thinking Techniques proposed by Perkins himself and his colleagues

#### *Sixth stage: First sub-topic experience reflection*

The assumptions regarding the first sub-topic that was examined, resulting from the process of steps b and c of the fifth stage are then recorded – either orally or in written. The final assumptions are compared with those expressed in step (a) of the fifth stage.

#### *Next steps: Subsequent sub-topics handling*

The other sub-topics, which have been chosen for examination (see third stage) are then explored critically and creatively.

#### *Last step*

During the last step, a reflection process on the whole experience of the examination of the topic is activated. All generated ideas are included in a synthesis. The final

assumptions of the participants about the topic at hand are being recorded and compared to those stated initially, in the 2nd stage.

### **Application of the Method, evaluation and important issues**

There are abbreviated versions of the method and one of those was used in our application in the Bank's training programmes: As experienced trainers we started from the 4<sup>th</sup> stage of the model and, based on our experience – in collaboration with the participants – we animated a process of selection of works of art which could trigger critical and creative reflection on the following topics:

1. Stress Management programme. Sub-topic: Work-life balance.
2. Effective Business Communication programme. Sub-topic: Non-verbal communication.
3. Handling difficult people and difficult situations. Sub-topic: Diversity.

This process was followed by the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and following stages of the Method.

The application of the method was successful, the trainees response positive and the training goal for developing critical thinking was met. Increased levels of participation were observed. Trainees themselves recognised and expressed that the method helped them to critically examine the topics and extend their views. Their answers and views at the last stage of reflection were measured as deeper in critical reflection.

However, it was realised that two aspects need to be considered carefully when designing a programme and applying the method were:

#### **A. Forming the critical questions.**

It is initially the responsibility of the trainer to identify or help her/his trainees to identify assumptions, relevant to the subject, that most of them carry, and which are necessary to be addressed if the training targets are to be met. This was found to be the most challenging part on working with the critical questions. As, the most difficult task was to “translate” the assumptions into questions in a way that will be inviting dialogue within the group.

#### **B. Choosing the appropriate works of art to be included in the learning situation**

The works of art in the Bank's application were selected:

1. according to Lafrenz's (2013) above mentioned three criteria.
2. as they had an element of time continuum and comprised the message which was suitable for the programme's targets.
3. as they were relative to the critical question

The most challenging issue in our case was the second one. We realised that we have to work on this issue further, searching how to select a work of art on the basis of carrying a strong message, which is not evident at first glance, inviting learners to think by themselves for a short while and then discuss in groups addressing in a critically reflective way their own, or the most common assumption on the specific subject.

This challenge is to be discussed within the presented Workshop. The Workshop introduces, briefly, the notions of critical thinking and critical question and their role in transformative learning as well as the Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience method. It exposes participants to various forms of art and their use in a vocational training environment. Finally, it focuses on the works of art selection criteria and the final design of a training course aiming to develop critical thinking.

### **Critique**

Although the effort is to create a learning situation that promotes questioning of assumptions and critical thinking, it is by no means sure that training actions always, most of the times, or even usually lead to transformative learning. Even if every step is being taken successfully it is difficult to think that transformation can be ensured just by the actions of the trainer and the favourable disposition of the learner.

One has only to keep in mind that the reference points, the values and the predispositions that one carries, took a number of years to cement themselves in one's intellect. It would be rather naive to think that through a perfectly designed training programme, the learner will question all or part of her/his own value system and actually decide that it needs to be changed. Educators should be content if at the end of the training they, together with their learners have scratched the upper level of the reference and value system.

Even so “Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience” method is a very powerful tool and every step of its application was being taken so that, as Cranton (2006) states, if we are believers in transformative learning being the main goal of education, then this will transpire to our relationship with the learners, the content we design, the context and ourselves and : “Thinking about authenticity, then, is a part of thinking about Transformative Education”. (Cranton, 2006, p.102).

### **Conclusions**

The National Bank of Greece S.A. experience has shown that it realistic to use training and specifically aesthetic experience to develop critical thinking in order to challenge individual or group assumptions in an effort to ensure that staff will be less hindered by preconceptions and more accepting to new and different situations and ideas, in order to cope with the ever changing economic environment.

However, trainers need to be aware of the difficulties in aiming to implement a transformative learning method in vocational training. Critical and creative reflection on adopted ideas, combined with an understanding of the arts is not an easy process. It requires consistency, patience and a sensitivity regarding the task – an attitude of life – in order to enable participants to progress. Using a systematic approach such as the “Transformative Learning through Aesthetic Experience” method can boost a start in the critical thinking process and make the steps to that path clear and steady.

Should this be a successful effort, there is a reward both for the learners' and the trainers, as they develop an open mind on what is happening to themselves and to the world, they are in the position to construct alternative structures, they are open to new perspectives and they are empowered to deal with work and life conditions in a more efficient way.

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#### **Internet Resources**

ARTiT <http://artit.eu/en>

Visible Thinking <http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org>

Artful Thinking <http://www.pzartfulthinking.org>

**Using art in developing the creative dimension  
of the adult educator's role**

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**ASPETE**

The Adult Educator's role is multidimensional and should be appropriately adjusted to the various educational conditions (Brookfield, 1986). According to Alan Rogers (1999) the adult educator is required to perform various roles such as change leader, listener, team leader, team member, etc (Rogers, 1999:291. Tsiboukli & Phillips, 2007).

According to Kokkos (2005) the adult educator functions as the coordinator and facilitator of the training process and as the one who has the ability to understand the phenomena related to the group dynamics developed within the training team. Thus, he/she should adapt his/her own approach in order to assist the training team in achieving the expected training results (Kokkos, 2005:120).

The effective adult educator has managed to incorporate creativity as an important dimension of his/her training role (Phillips & Fragoulis, 2012). In this workshop the educator's creative dimension as well as the participants' transformation resulting from this role, is highlighted by the use of the Perkins Model of art observation and analysis. More specifically, critical reflection will be exploited in order to approach the participants' attitudes regarding the adult educator's role during the learning process. Participants will critically approach their perceptions in relation to the role of the adult educator and will challenge their existing conceptions and theoretical schemes. The contribution of self-reflection is quite important to this effort, since through such process they will have to redefine their perceptions, experiences and feelings regarding the role of the adult educator.

More specifically the French movie **L'École buissonnière**» (1949, directed by Jean-Paul Le Chanois) is exploited in order to emphasize the creative role of the adult educator in the training process and the participants' transformation of their experiences, feelings and attitudes in relation to this role.

The analysis of the movie will be approached through the Perkin's Model and its proposed four stages as described in the relevant bibliography (Perkins, 1994, Kokkos, 2011). More specifically the four phases are: 1<sup>st</sup>: Time for Observation, 2<sup>nd</sup>: Open and adventurous observation, 3<sup>rd</sup>: Analytical and deeper observation, 4<sup>th</sup>: Review of Process.

**Description of the two-hour workshop**

During the first hour of the workshop participants will be introduced to the creative dimension of the adult educator's role as well as the exploitation of art in the teaching practice. Critical Issues that will be addressed are 1) What are the attributed of the creative adult educator? 2) How can art be exploited in adult education.

The workshop's first hour outline is described as follows:

**MINUTES**    **TOPIC**

0-10'	Team members introduce themselves
10-20'	Brain Storming: “ <i>What methods/tools can be used in order to exploit art in the teaching practice?</i> ”
20-30'	Participants watch a clip of the 1949 movie: “ <i>L'École buissonnière</i> ”
30-45'	Group Work: The movie clip functions as a stimulus for the participants who work in small groups in order to elaborate on the following two questions: 1) “ <i>How can the adult educator be creative during the training process?</i> ” 2) “ <i>What knowledge, skills and attitudes an educator should have in order to achieve creativity effectively?</i> ”
45-60'	Group representatives announce their views in the plenary and discussion takes place.

During the workshop's second hour the Perkins' theoretical model and the four stages of understanding art is being exploited. Objectives are to a) emphasize the importance of creativity in the educator's role during the training process and b) to highlight the importance of art in developing the educator's creativity. The entire process aims to contribute to the participants' transformation of attitudes, experiences and feelings regarding the creative role of the adult educator.

The critical question that will be addressed during the 4<sup>th</sup> phase of the Perkins Model is: “*How important is the dimension of creativity in the adult educator's role and why?*”

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## **Constructive – Developmental Approach to Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience: An example of Teaching in Primary School**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is about the contribution of aesthetic experience in transforming our basically stereotype ideas and in the development of critical thinking. An example of teaching in Primary School, by approaching critically Environmental Pollution by exploring artworks, is presented, using the method “Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience”.

#### *The existing situation in Primary School.*

Nowadays, rapid developments and changes in social, political, cultural, technological, financial and ecological level, result in the continuous reconsideration of knowledge, which makes people and societies adopt lifelong learning practices. The educational system and school, as formal institution of learning, taking into consideration the challenges of modern life, aim at the development of student's personality as a whole, at student's critical thinking and at smooth incorporation in the society.

However, in typical education, we insist on increasing students' knowledge and on supporting and broadening their capacities, namely the informative learning, and less on transforming the way students learn, namely the transformative learning (Kegan in Mezirow & Associates, 2006).

Students aged 11-12 years old of Primary School, have already formed their frames of reference, as they incorporate the social models in which they live and grow in, their parents' idiosyncrasy, the culture of their family and social environment, and taking them into consideration, they try to make analogies and interpret their new experiences. Students seldom face their own assumptions about an aspect, in order to enrich or transform them in case they prove to be wrong. Therefore, they gradually develop stereotype opinions and perceptions as well as dysfunctional frames of reference, which they will not be able to recognize and transform as adults (Mezirow in Mezirow & Associates, 2006).

#### *Kegan's Theory - The second order of consciousness.*

According to Kegan's theory about the orders of consciousness of the individual, students aged 11 – 12 years old are running the second order of consciousness. In a cognitive level, they are able to understand the range of situations, to justify according to cause and effect, to classify facts, to construct a narrative quoting some facts. In a social level, they have personal opinion about an aspect, they are able to put themselves in the position of others, as well as manipulate effectively others in order to satisfy their own needs. Intrapersonally, they can control their impulses in order to satisfy their motives.

On the other hand, in the field of learning, they are not able to generalize, they do not count on theories or scientific facts, but they refer to scientific facts which have impressed them or have been imposed to them by the educational system. Furthermore, they quote their ideas incompletely, descriptively, without further process and critical analysis. In a social level, they find it difficult to simultaneously

manage their own opinion as well as others' and to maintain mutual intrapersonal relationships with common expectations. Intrapersonally, they are not able to combine multiple and different opinions or recognize specific characteristics to somebody else, according to his internal psychological reactions. For example, they cannot realize that someone is too introvert because of his family and social environment (Kegan, 1994).

However, we – as teachers – demand from our students of that age to behave or think “more maturely”, holistically, not only to think of their own needs, to use and to combine their knowledge effectively, to have empathy and approach an aspect in a critical way. We usually focus on their existing knowledge or knowledge they can acquire, on what they can comprehend and which point they can reach. We do not pay attention on the way they learn and understand. If our students perceive the world through the lenses of second order of consciousness, it is meaningless to force them to face any situation through the lenses of an upper order of consciousness. Consequently, we expect them to approach a topic in a holistic and critical way, to suggest alternative ways to solve a difficult situation, to quote carefully their ideas, to use theoretical facts and justify their opinions. They cannot meet our demands, so they often give up and stop trying.

As Kathleen Taylor (2006) mentions, we need to help our students realize the point they are now and at the same time offer them a “bridge” towards the point they can reach. That “bridge” resembles to the “Zone of Proximal Development” according to Vygotsky (1934/1986), which refers to the distance between the actual developmental level of the student, namely everything he can achieve by his own, and the level he can reach if he is supported by somebody else, usually an adult. By this way, we offer our students, through the educational act, opportunities to develop their horizontal capacities, such as empathy, creativity, metacognition, critical thinking, among others.

*The development of critical thinking through art.*

One of the main goals of education is to support students to become citizens who think critically. Students aged 11 – 12 years old, have not become yet persons with critical thinking, but they are able to begin developing this capacity. Especially through the method “Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience”, students explore artworks of high aesthetic value, which contributes to the development of their critical thinking. Artworks of high aesthetic value are characterized by the truth they contain, but simultaneously raise open questions and do not have a specific answer. One forms his own opinion and at the same time poses his own questions concerning the artwork (Kokkos in Kokkos & Associates, 2011). Generally, contact with important artworks develops critical thinking because of their unconventional character, their authentic meanings, their different interpretations. All the aforementioned, gradually uncage students' thought from their stereotype perceptions and the simplified acceptance of social reality, as this is introduced to us every day. Especially for the students' of that age, systematic contact with art, supports and develops the multiple intelligences, as Gardner (1983) mentions, which leads them gradually to become critically aware of some issues and dimensions of the reality, which might not be perceived through traditional teaching (ARTiT, 2012).

In order to achieve critical thinking, we need to:

- Point out the assumptions that influence the way we think and react.
- Check out and value the accuracy and validity of our assumptions.
- See things from different points of view.



- Take informed action, which means to make sure that our actions are important and worthwhile (Brookfield, 2012).

As it is obvious, students of that age are not able either to point out their assumptions or to value them. However, contact with art gives them the opportunity to pose their own questions, to express their opinions, to find different solutions for a problem, to accept multiple answers, to put themselves into the position of the others, to value their own opinions and to reassess their goals (Eisner, 2000). As Brookfield (2012) mentions, all the aforementioned are aspects of critical thinking, which can be improved and developed through various techniques and teaching methods in typical education, as this specific method to be presented here below.

Of course, as Sternberg (1985) states, there is a huge distance between what we consider necessary for critical thinking in adulthood and what it is taught in typical education in order to develop critical thinking. He points out that “the problems of thinking in the real world do not correspond well with the problems of the large majority of programs that teach critical thinking. We are preparing students to deal with problems that are in many respects unlike those that they will face as adults”. However, the method “Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience” through the systematic observation of artworks, gives students the opportunity to perceive that there is not a specific answer on what an artwork represents and that they should examine it holistically, in order to fully understand it. Same applies for every complicated issue of life which is not solved through only one way. By doing that, students discover not only the many abilities of everyday life, but also their own personal abilities (Eisner, 2000). As Perkins (1994) mentions “to think better, people need to develop general commitments and strategies toward giving thinking more time and thinking in more broad and adventurous, clear and organized ways”.

Here below, we describe an example using this specific method with students aged 11 – 12, approaching Environmental Pollution.

### **“Transformative Learning Through Aesthetic Experience” – An example of approaching Environmental Pollution.**

This specific method includes six stages, which we are going to analyze using specific examples:

*First stage: Determination of the need to critically examine a topic.*

At the first stage of the method we face students' stereotype opinions about a topic, which needs to be approached critically. These students seemed to be interested in different aspects of protection of the environment, for example the benefits of recycling, the air pollution caused by non – renewable sources of energy and oil pollution of the sea, the destruction of the food chains. However, they did not recycle consciously, even though there was a recycling bin in their classroom. Furthermore, I realized that even though they could talk about the consequences of environment pollution to our life, they were not able neither to focus on modern man's responsibility for the increase of environmental pollution and on the reasons that he insists to destroy nature, nor to suggest alternative ways to solve this problem. In other words, they were facing a kind of disorienting dilemma. Through the courses of Language and Physics, we have discussed a lot with the students about these issues and we concluded that modern man interacts with the environment and that environmental destruction affects his life. Thus, we agreed to analyze the relationship between modern man and the environment, as well as the fact that he is responsible for protecting the environment.

*Second stage: The students express their ideas about the topic.*

I asked the students to answer the following question: “In your opinion what kind of relationship modern man develops with the environment?”. Then I asked them to form groups and draw up a report which would express the opinion of their group. Then every group would read the text out loud. Indicatively, I mention the following answers:

1<sup>st</sup> group: “In our opinion, the relationship between modern man and the environment is not so good, because he is not protecting the woods and the animals. The species that exist in nature do not impress certain people and they try to destroy the nature.”

2<sup>nd</sup> group: “The environment is everything, it is our whole life. Modern man takes advantage of it for its goods. He uses them in an unbearable way, without thinking that these goods are responsible for his life. He destroys the woods which offer him oxygen. He does not respect the animals and he kills them without any reason for their meat and rich fur. Finally, natural environment is the cause for man's survival.”

*Third stage: Identification of the sub-topics and the critical questions that should be approached.*

After studying their answers, I came to the following conclusions. The groups have mentioned two sub – topics: a) the need to protect the environment, as pollution affects our health and b) the endless exploitation of the environment for man's benefit.

In order to approach these topics in a holistic and critical way, I formulated the following critical questions:

- a) Why modern man continues to destroy the environment, although he knows that his actions affect his health?
- b) Does modern man have real benefits by the irrational exploitation of the environment?

*Forth stage: Selection of artworks.*

In this stage, I presented to the students various artworks, which were related to the subject we were studying, such as artworks of Magritte, Signac, Rousseau, Naoya Hatakeyama, and I let them choose the artwork they wanted to analyze. The students chose the following artwork:



“A stroll in the woods”  
H. Rousseau

*Fifth stage: Elaboration of the works of art using Perkin's method basic stages.*

We started analyzing Paul Signac's artwork “A stroll in the woods” (1886), using the basic stages of Perkin's technique (1994).

First phase: Giving Looking Time.

In that phase, I asked the students to look at the artwork, express their first questions about what they see and conclude to a main question.

They mentioned the following: “I see a woman, she may be a queen, who enjoys a

walk in the woods during spring. She is looking backwards”.

The questions that raised were the following: “Why don't the trees have so many leaves at the front and why their trunk is black?” “Why is the woman looking backwards?” “Why does she hold an umbrella although it does not seem to rain?”

Their main question was: “Why is the woman looking backwards?”

Second phase: Making Looking Broad and Adventurous.

During that phase, I asked the students to tell me “a story” about this artwork and to search for characteristics of the artwork that surprise them, and to express their feelings.

I asked them: “What is happening here?” and they answered:

- The woman was feeling awful at her home and decided to walk in the woods, in order to feel better.
- The woman went for a walk in the woods and realized that it caught fire. She is looking at the back to see the fire coming towards her and she is trying to find some help.
- The woman set the fire on purpose for her own reasons. Maybe she wants to build a house later, but now she wants to get away or hide. She is looking backwards to make sure that nobody saw her. She is dressed very formally in order not to be suspected.

Students were impressed by the following:

The woman is alone, her look is melancholic, she is holding an umbrella that is not necessary, she wears impressing clothes, she is looking opposite her way. The trunks of some trees are black, some of the trees do not have many leaves, the colour of the sky is dark and in the middle of the painting there are vivid orange and pink colours.

Expression of their feelings:

They felt: fear, anxiety, sadness because of the fire in the woods, depression and devastation because the destruction of the nature affects human beings. Some students, on the other hand said that they felt happiness because they were looking at a beautiful scenery.

Third phase: Making Looking Clear and Deep.

During that phase the students could express their personal answers to the questions they had posed earlier.

Trying to interpret the “surprises”.

Firstly, we tried to interpret the absence of people. Some students mentioned that when you walk in the woods, the beauty of nature relaxes you and you do not need others around you. Some other students mentioned that a person who destroys nature is gradually isolated and ends up alone.

The woman's look is melancholic and she is looking backwards because she has contributed in the destruction of a part of the woods – either by building her house or by setting it on fire – but now she has realized her mistake and is really sad, because she cannot enjoy nature. She is afraid of going back to face the destruction she has caused.

The strange colour of the sky symbolizes the gradual destruction of the environment by the air pollution and the increase of carbon dioxide because of the burning of the trees.

The fact that some trees have very few leaves was interpreted like this: a part of the woods may have been burnt before, the trees have been weakened and now they need a long period of time to renew their rich foliage.

Reconsidering the basic question:

After all this conversation, I asked them the basic question they had posed: “Why is the woman looking backwards?” and the students answered that she is watching the gradual destruction of the woods, while she is responsible for it. She is trying to get away from what she has done and not take up her responsibility.

Forth phase: Retrospect of the elaboration.

During this phase, I asked the students to remember all the phases of this particular technique and re-examine everything that was mentioned, according to the critical questions. The students' answers were the following:

- Modern man destroys the environment because he believes that he covers his own needs.
- People make arsons to build houses and increase their profits.
- Man's greed and vanity lead him to illogical destruction of the environment. He builds a luxurious house in the woods not necessarily for selling it, but to show off. He wants to show that he has the financial ability to build it and that he feels happy to live in a place like that.
- By burning the woods, we reduce the oxygen and increase the carbon dioxide, which causes a huge destruction of the ozone layer.
- We do not have a real benefit by destroying the environment, because our financial profits are trivial compared to many serious problems, such as the decrease of oxygen and the hole in the ozone layer.
- When the trees are few, they cannot absorb a percentage of sound of the cities, resulting in noise pollution, among others.

*Sixth stage: Re-evaluation of first expressions and enrichment.*

At this stage, I returned to students their first texts where they answered the question “In your opinion what is the relationship between modern man and the environment?” and I asked them to write again their opinion in groups, enriching their texts with everything we have processed in the previous stages. The answers of the same groups are the following:

1<sup>st</sup> group: “In our opinion, we believe that modern man destroys the environment to cover his needs and increase his profit. In order to build luxurious houses in the woods, he burns them and the effects are the following: oxygen is reduced, carbon dioxide is increased and the ozone layer is destroyed. Animals eat plants with dangerous pesticides, causing them many side effects. For example, their milk and meat are polluted. We consume their products and we harm our health. This is man's fault because he does not think of his real benefit.”

2<sup>nd</sup> group: “Modern man destroys the environment because he thinks that by doing this, he covers his needs. We burn the woods and by doing this, we decrease oxygen, we increase carbon dioxide and gradually we create the greenhouse effect. Actually, he does not have a real benefit, because by doing all the aforementioned – for example he cuts trees to build houses – he manages to harm and pollute himself. The larger percentage of people does not contribute to the protection of the environment and only 20% is sensitive about it. Thus, man constructs luxurious houses in the woods, because he wants to show off his wealth. This is called vanity. When he realizes how much he has destroyed nature and the fact that he cannot bring it back to its first situation, it will be too late and he will not be able to do anything. On the other hand, there is a positive side. There are some environmental organizations which help people to become sensitive about protecting the environment, such as WWF,

GREENPEACE. We can make an effort to improve the place we live in by recycling. If everybody does his part to protect the environment, our life would be better.”

Comparing students' first texts in the second stage of this method with those of the sixth stage, we realize that their first and basically stereotype ideas were enriched, their ideas were more clear, more precise, actual, analytical and their speech stopped being simply denunciative. They tried to mention the causes and effects of environmental pollution and simultaneously they suggested alternative ways to face this problem, combining the opinions that were expressed during this method and their previous knowledge. Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, we conclude that they have approached environmental pollution in a holistic and critical way, making a first step towards the transformation of their first ideas.

A crucial fact was that students realized that the protection of the environment is something that concerns everybody, not only adults, and that even they are responsible for its protection or destruction. Thus, they suggested several ideas in order to improve the environment they spend a lot of time in every day, namely their classroom and their school. For example to start recycling papers and plastic bottles by throwing them in the recycling bin, to keep their classroom clean, to water the plants in the school yard, to switch off the lights of their classroom to save energy. Using their suggestions, we created an “Environmental Contract”, which was signed by all the students and by this way they were committed to follow it. Through this contract, students have become aware of the reality they live in and decided not to accept it in a passive way, but to take informed action to contribute to the change of this reality, in relation to their age. In this way, they have made a basic step to achieve critical thinking, as Freire mentions: “Reflection, pure reflection, leads to action” (Freire, 1977).

### *Discussion*

The demands of modern society for citizens with critical thinking and awareness, capable of managing the continuous changes of life, have moved the interest of education to the development of critical thinking and transformation of students' stereotype perceptions.

Art constitutes a “window onto the Chaos”, as Kornelius Castoriades stated (2008), namely a way to face our deepest thoughts, our agonies, our anxieties, our assumptions. It gives us the chance as teachers and educators to help our students express all these deep thoughts and to realize the way they understand the world around them. Moreover, art according to Dewey (1934 [1980]) constitutes the vehicle for the development of reflective thought, which contains facets of critical and creative thinking. While trying to understand artworks, we need to use our imagination and try to face reality in a different way, using both forms of thought.

According to Marcuse (1978), art may contribute substantially to the changing of the world. When we try to explain the world around us through aesthetic values, for example paying attention to detail, examining holistically a situation, reading between the lines, combining critical and creative thinking, gradually we will start to uncage our consciousness from everything which is presented as social reality and we tend to accept it uncritically (Adorno, 2002). Consequently, its systematic use in typical and non - typical education, with the appropriate teaching method, as referred in the aforementioned, may be the “key” and the “bridge” for the development of critical thinking and transformation of stereotype perceptions and ideas.

As Marcuse (1972) mentions, “in the universe that art creates, every word, every colour, every sound is “new”, different – breaking the familiar context of perception

and understanding, of sense certainly and reason in which men and nature are enclosed” .

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