TRANSFORMATIVE DIMENSIONS OF ADULT LEARNING
   by Jack Mezirow

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appear at the moment but in the context of their history (purpose) and consequences in the learners' lives.

Toward a Philosophy of Adult Education

Transformation theory is a theory of adult learning. As such, it attempts to describe and analyze how adults learn to make meaning of their experience. A philosophy of adult education predicated upon this understanding of the nature of adult learning is a prescription for the educational interventions that are appropriate to help adults learn.

Establishment of Ideal Learning Conditions. In Chapter Three, following Habermas, I made the claim that we all depend upon consensual validation to establish the meaning of our assertions, especially in the communicative domain of learning, and that an ideal set of conditions for participation in critical discourse is implicit in the very nature of human communication. These same conditions are fundamental to a philosophy of adult education because they are also the ideal conditions for adult learning. They are essential components in the validating process of rational discourse through which we move toward meaning perspectives that are more developmentally advanced, that is, more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative of experience. Under these ideal conditions, participants in discourse

- 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.

If the cardinal goal of adult education is to help learners learn what they want to learn and at the same time acquire more

developmentally advanced meaning perspectives, it follows that these ideal conditions of adult learning become the criteria for evaluating educational programs; they constitute an educator's "bottom line." "Ideal" is used here not as an unattainable goal of perfection but as a judgment of value. The ideal is present in every action, as a judgment of better and worse. Not only educational practices but economic, political, and social practices and institutions as well may be judged according to the degree to which they foster or impede the realization of these ideal conditions of participation in adult learning for all.

Free, full adult participation in critical discourse and resulting action clearly requires freedom, democratic participation, equality, reciprocity, and prior education through which one has learned to assess evidence effectively, make and understand relevant arguments, develop critical judgment, and engage in critical reflection. Such participation also implies a reasonable minimal level of safety, mental and physical health, shelter, and employment opportunity, as well as acceptance of others with different perspectives and social cooperation. Values such as freedom, democracy, justice, equality, and social cooperation may be cherished so universally at least partly because they represent the essential conditions under which human beings can make sense or meaning of their experience.

Andragogy. Andragogy is the professional perspective of adult educators. It has been defined as an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners. A study by Suanmali (1981) documented nearly unanimous agreement among 174 members of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education that an adult educator, as a practitioner of andragogy, must fulfill the following goals set forth by Mezirow (1981, p. 42).

1. Progressively decrease the learner's dependency on the educator.
2. Help the learner understand how to use learning resources, especially the experience of others, including the educator, and how to engage in reciprocal learning relationships.

3. Assist the learner to define his/her learning needs, both in terms of immediate awareness and in terms of understanding the cultural and psychological assumptions influencing his/her perceptions of needs.
4. Assist the learner to assume increasing responsibility for defining learning objectives, planning his/her own learning program, and evaluating progress.
5. Help the learner organize what is to be learned in relationship to his/her current personal problems, concerns, and levels of understanding.
6. Foster learner decision making, select relevant learning experiences that require choosing, expand the learner's range of options, and facilitate the learner's taking the perspectives of others who have alternative ways of understanding.
7. Encourage the use of criteria for judging that are increasingly inclusive and differentiating in awareness, self-reflexive, and integrative of experience.
8. Foster a self-corrective, reflexive approach to learning — to typifying and labeling, to perspective taking and choosing, and to habits of learning and learning relationships.
9. Facilitate posing and solving of problems, including problems associated with the implementation of individual and collective action, and recognition of the relationship between personal problems and public issues.
10. Reinforce the self-concept of the learner as a learner and doer by providing for progressive mastery and for a supportive climate with feedback to encourage provisional efforts to change and to take risks; by avoiding competitive judgment of performance; and by appropriate use of mutual support groups.
11. Emphasize experiential, participative, and projective instructional methods and use modeling and learning contracts where appropriate.
12. Make the moral distinction between helping the learner understand his/her full range of choices and ways to improve the quality of choosing and encouraging the learner to make a specific choice.

These practice injunctions clearly bear a close relationship to transformation theory. Helping adults elaborate, create, and transform their meaning schemes (beliefs, feelings, interpretations, decisions) through reflection on their content, the process by which they were learned, and their premises (social context, history, and consequences) is what andragogy is about.

New data — information and interpretations of subject "content" — are filtered not only through existing meaning schemes but also through meaning perspectives, which often distort the way one learns. This is why the educator must not simply focus on the materials to be learned or their "presentation skills" if significant learning is intended. When learners suffer from tunnel vision, when they encounter troublesome issues, when they have difficulty in learning or lack motivation, they must be helped to become aware of the relationship of new data to what they already know — their relevant meaning schemes — and to understand why they see the new data as they do. This means that the educator must actively encourage reflective discourse through which learners can examine the justification for their meaning schemes and perspectives as well as focusing on the new data presented.

Ethical Considerations

Encouraging learners to challenge and transform meaning perspectives raises serious ethical questions. For example, is it unethical for an educator to:

- Intentionally precipitate transformative learning without making sure that the learner fully understands that such transformation may result?
- Facilitate a perspective transformation when its consequences may include dangerous or hopeless actions?
- Decide which among a learner's beliefs should become questioned or problematized?
- Present his or her own perspective, which may be unduly influential with the learner?
- Refuse to help a learner plan to take action because the edu-

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IDENTIFYING CORE CONCEPTS OF ADULT EDUCATION AS AN EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

I.Please indicate the degree of importance of each of the following ten concepts for adult education as an educational process of facilitating adult learning by distributing 100 points of importance among them, assigning the more important concepts a larger number of points than the less important concepts.

To assist adults to enhance their capability to function as self-directed learners, the educator must:

1. progressively decrease the learner's dependency on the educators;   _____

2. help the learner to understand how to use learning resources--especially the experiences of others, including the educator, and how to engage others in reciprocal learning relations;   _____

3. assist the learner to define his/her learning needs--both in terms of immediate awareness and of understanding the cultural and psychological assumptions influencing his/her perceptions of needs;   _____

4. assist learners to assume increasing responsibility for defining their learning objectives, planning their own learning programs and evaluating their progress;   _____

5. organize what is to be learned in relationship to his/her current personal problems, concerns and levels of understanding;   _____

6. foster learner decision-making--select learner-relevant learning experiences which require choosing, expand the learner's range of options, facilitate taking the perspectives of others who have alternative ways of understanding;   _____

7. encourage the use of criteria for judging which are increasingly inclusive and differentiating in awareness, self-reflexive and integrative of experience;   _____

8. facilitate problem-posing and problem-solving, including problems associated with the implementation of individual and collective action; recognition of relationship between personal problems and public issues;   _____

9. reinforce the self-concept of the learner as a learner and doer by providing for progressive mastery; supportive climate with feedback to encourage provisional efforts to change and to take risks; avoidance of competitive judgment of performance; appropriate use of mutual support groups;   _____

10. emphasize experiential, participative and projective instructional methods; appropriate use of modelling and learning contracts;   _____

TOTAL   100