

Transformative Learning in Adult Education

Georgios Giannoukos

Ph.D., Research Scholar

Second Chance School

Prefecture of Sterea Ellada

Greece

g.giannoukos@gmail.com

Abstract

The particular features that adult learners have impart an orientation to the design, implementation and evaluation of the educational process and so adult education theory is supported by the learning theories. The various theories that have been developed have a common denominator which is the opinion that learning is active. According to Rogers (1999) adult training comprises their active participation and the encouraging of their self-determination, which increases their tendency towards adulthood. Jackson and Caffarella (1994) in their book "Experiential Learning: A New Approach" referring to the characteristics of effective adult education, emphasize that in order for the trainer to successfully live up to his role, he must make use of a large tank filled with methods and techniques that give him the ability to produce the appropriate learning experiences for the learners and to promote interaction, always combined with the use of appropriate teaching aids and strategies and of the class structure.

Keywords: Transformative Learning, Adult Education, Second Chance School

Introduction

Transformative learning in education refers to the process through which individuals undergo significant shifts in their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors as a result of their

educational experiences. This type of learning goes beyond simply acquiring new information or skills; it involves a deep, personal reflection that leads to a fundamental change in how individuals understand themselves and the world around them. Educators play a crucial role in facilitating transformative learning by creating environments that encourage critical thinking, self-reflection, and open dialogue. By fostering transformative learning experiences, educators can empower students to challenge their assumptions, expand their perspectives, and ultimately become more engaged and active participants in their own learning journey. The development of adult education has brought about changes in the role played by the trainer to the smooth conduct of the educational process. The fact of change of the traditional teacher roles in the foreign language to an innovative trainer that combines the teaching of technical active/experiential and short-term recommendations (particularly the statement of objectives) is now obvious. The traditional form of teaching with the teacher as a central axis, as an authority and main transmitter of knowledge, has given its position to the innovative instructor, using operative techniques that promote learning and lead trainees to adulthood, self-determination and autonomy by developing their critical thinking ((Kokkos, 2005; Rogers, 1999). The main reference point is now the learner and his needs. Therefore, the teacher is asked to perform the teaching work aiming not only to promote active participation and empowerment of learners.

Mezirow's Theory of Transformative Learning

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, developed by Jack Mezirow, is a prominent framework that explores how individuals undergo profound shifts in their perspectives, beliefs, and behaviors through the process of critical reflection and self-examination. According to Mezirow, transformative learning occurs when individuals experience a disorienting dilemma or a significant life event that challenges their existing assumptions and beliefs. This leads to a process of critical reflection, where individuals

question their perspectives, consider alternative viewpoints, and ultimately reframe their understanding of themselves and the world around them. Through this process, individuals can develop new ways of thinking and acting that are more inclusive, open-minded, and transformative. Mezirow's theory highlights the importance of fostering critical reflection and dialogue in educational settings to support individuals in their transformative learning journey.

Mezirow claims that the review and amendment of erroneous attitudes, opinions and perceptions of adults, all of which lead to the modification of their behaviour, ultimately helps to easily adapt to the new circumstances. With the development of critical reflection the release of adult dilemmas that require external conditions or interpretations rolls of the ruling ideology (Mezirow, 1990) is accomplished. Therefore learning enables man through society.

The autonomy of thought is one of the main purposes of transformative learning and is achieved with the help of the trainer that encourages adult learners to explore the wider frame of reference of the object being studied. This way the students acquire social responsibility and are empowered because they perceive the breadth of their capabilities. The instructor's roles alternate continuously with encouraging, support, solidarity and consulting being the dominant characteristics. The main trainer's objective is still the transfer of power from the instructor to the training group.

Mezirow considers that the process of transformative learning is the result of the crisis experienced by the adult learner who faces disorienting dilemmas. Therefore, when finding a solution to these dilemmas is impossible, mainly from the fact that the adult learner uses past strategies for solving his problems, he enters in a new self-examination process that is accompanied by feelings of shame or guilt.

The critical assessment contained in the realized self-assessment leads the adult learner to the assumption that his co-trainees also have such experiences. This assumption

promotes the research of new alternative roles, relationships and actions that determine the plan of action.

The action plans includes the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, the testing of new roles, the negotiation of relationships and creation of new ones and the construction of self-confidence and new skills. In its final form the individual is reinstated but he also has a new transformed perspective.

The ten stages that help the adult learner to achieve transformative learning are the following:

1. A disorienting dilemma.
2. Self-assessment (in accordance with the existence of similar sentiments e.g. shame).
3. Evaluation of the assumptions in a critical way.
4. The adult learner recognizes the source that causes him displeasure and the shares it with his co-trainees, leading to transformation.
5. The search of new roles, relationships and modes of action.
6. The design of the action plan.
7. The acquisition of attitudes and skills for the realization of the action plan.
8. The testing of the new roles.
9. The construction of self-confidence and abilities to respond to the new roles and relationships.
10. The reintegration into life in according to the conditions which have been formed from the new perspectives (Mezirow, 1990).

The Example of The Second-Chance School Operating in a Jail

A second-chance school operating in a jail provides educational opportunities for individuals who are incarcerated, offering them a chance to acquire knowledge, skills, and personal growth that can support their rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society

upon release. These schools often focus on providing tailored educational programs that address the unique needs and challenges faced by incarcerated individuals, such as basic literacy skills, vocational training, and social-emotional learning. By offering education within the jail setting, second-chance schools aim to empower individuals to break the cycle of incarceration, improve their prospects for employment and personal development, and ultimately reduce recidivism rates. This approach aligns with the broader goal of promoting rehabilitation and reentry support for individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

Detained students in second-chance schools have the opportunity to obtain a high school at the end of a two year cycle of courses before their release. However, the degree of completion of learning from these learners depends on factors that are complex and not controllable by the educational context.

Qualitative and quantitative researches after their release will show if and to what extent the change was actually achieved. A number of imprisoned trainees at the beginning of their effort will insist that all of their hard work will be lost since their life conditions will lead them back to earlier habits to address their problems of survival (stage 1).

Participating in a second chance school often revives unpleasant memories of their educational past dominated by a feeling of frustration and the abandonment of their studies due to the dire economic situation and the sterile teacher-oriented educational system, reminding them of the modern dogmatism prevailing among the prison officers at each stage, the word school is a synonym of the word prison for most of them. Painful memories and feelings of shame, disappointment and frustration from the experiences of the past come to the fore (stage 2) by which they then critically evaluate their family assumptions and their social environment of an era when the dominant idea was a dysfunctional school system and the poor learning of a foreign language (stage 3).

By identifying the source of the assumptions and group cooperation teaching that emphasizes the use of active and experiential techniques (role-playing / problem-solving) in second-chance schools, the students slowly but surely eliminate these feelings of loneliness (stage 4).

All these lead detainees to seek and adopt new roles aimed at social rehabilitation (stage 5).

The Educational Process in the Formation of a New Point of view

The transformation of our assumptions starts from the existence of some misleading dilemmas which are resolved after a self-testing process of them.

The teacher-oriented teaching seems to be welcomed more often by adult learners who possess clear assumptions arising from their own educational experiences while depriving learners to engage in the learning process in an active / experiential way, through learner-centered and interactive activities that will allow them to utilize their experience in the learning process. The role of the trainer should be more facilitative, advisory and inspirational to learners and less steering / leading, in other words, the initiative for action and communication should cease to belong exclusively to the instructor and the initiative should belong to the learners. In the process of obtaining this transformed point of view, the interpretation of the trainer's personal disorienting dilemma, plays an important role, in other words the analysis of assumptions about the role of the instructor that he has as a trainee. Thus, according to the Mezirow (1997) when the object of critical reflection is an assumption, a different sequence of abstract thinking is introduced, with serious potential to bring about change in one's fixed reference frame.

Therefore, from the instructor's personal experience as a student and as a teacher, the assumptions he has made about the trainer often reflect a totally teacher-oriented teaching model where the teacher is considered an authority and the "Broadcaster" of predefined knowledge has changed and the amendment of the practical training theory in group

cooperation eventually becomes a partaker transformation, since the theory of transformative learning may lead to the revision of thoughts and attitudes through the process of critical reflection on the sources of people's assumptions.

According to Mezirow (1990) critic thought is a component of our point of view's and assumptions transformation that have been implanted by our cultural context and is a prerequisite for the more harmonious integration into reality. It is now clear that the transformative learning recognizes the individual's potential for positive personal change and focuses on the utilization of the adult learners' experiences for critical reflection.

Conclusions

In adult education the teacher is no longer a typical knowledge transmitter, but a catalyst, a coordinator of the learning process, a mediator, someone who knows how to use active techniques while coordinating a group, to animate, to help it take initiatives and work collaboratively. The trainer, however, has internal restraining factors and he is not omniscient. Therefore, as claimed by Rogers (1999), the trainer's work needs to be learned and it's a procedure that takes time.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2025 by Georgios Giannoukos Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

References

- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Jackson, L., & Caffarella, R. (1994). *Experiential learning: A new approach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Knowles, M. (1984). *Andragogy in action*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kokkos, A. (2005). *Adult education*. Athens: Metaichmio.
- Koutouzis, M. (2005). Planning, recruitment and human resources selection in adult education units. In M. Koutouzis & E. Prokou (Eds.), *Design, management, evaluation training programs for adults: Credit management (Vol. III)*. Patra: HOU Publishing.
- Mezirow, J. (1990). *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood: A guide to transformative and emancipatory learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1997). Transformation theory: Theory to practice. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 1997(74), 5–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.7401>
- Mezirow, J. (2007). *The transformative learning*. Athens: Metechmio.
- Rogers, A. (1999). *Adult education*. Athens: Metaichmio.