PHI 800 - Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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Professor

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Assignment

Assignment #3 – Essay

1. Write a 5-page paper based on **one (1)** of the three (3) items below:
   * ●  List and discuss the fundamental principles of adult education theory. Identify  elements of the OGS degree program that correspond to each principle.
   * ●  **Explain Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory. How does the OGS approach to transformative learning promote critical reflection for transcending barriers to personal growth and social impact?**
   * ●  Assess Jane Vella's 12 Twelve Principles for Effective Adult Learning and the application of quantum thinking. Discuss how OGS promotes quantum thinking (holistic, integrated, spiritual, and energetic).
2. Paper Outline
   * Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.
   * Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.
   * End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.
   * Use a minimum of seven scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

**Thesis Statement**

Omega Graduate School (OGS), through its incorporation of the Oxford Tutorial Method of instruction, provides adult learners a safe place to think. Consistent with Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, the learning experience at OGS is transformative, lifting barriers to personal growth and stretching learners so that they may create constructive social change.

**Introduction**

Transformative Learning Theory hails from the field of education, originally formulated by Professor Jack Mezirow in 1975 based on research that he conducted with women returning to a community college program.

As an overview, Transformative Learning Theory was developed to help educators understand the nature of significant and powerful learning that changes the learner in profound and long-lasting ways. Transformative Learning Theory has since been challenged and built upon by numerous practicing educators and policymakers, but for the purpose of this assignment it is necessary to limit the scope to a simplified overview of Mezirow’s initial idea and how it relates to the adult learning experience at OGS.

Everyone has a set of *meaning perspectives* that develop as a result of their upbringing and life experiences; these are taken for granted as ways of seeing ourselves in the world. By adulthood, people are fully conscious of these perspectives and tend to assume that they universally represent the way things are.

When encountering new knowledge, adults filter it through their own meaning perspectives and they add this new knowledge to their existing way of seeing the world. Much of the adult learning experience takes place like this. It doesn't transform one’s way of looking at the world; it builds upon it, adding to what Mezirow called our *existing meaning* –– schemes and subsets of beliefs that are shaped by those larger meanings (Mezirow, 1991, p. 107).

The meaning perspectives through which we filter new learning happen in three ways: personal or psychological, sociolinguistic or epistemic personal, or psychological meaning perspectives. In other words, these represent our beliefs about ourselves and the kinds of things we can do. These perspectives can manifest as a form of internal dialogue; for example, ‘maybe I'm not the kind of person who can do this or that. Or it would be wrong of me to do that.’ Sociolinguistic meaning perspectives are what we believe about the world and society and the way they are organized; for example our beliefs about class, race, gender, economics, etc. An epistemic meeting for flexible perspectives –– epistemic meaning perspectives are what we believe about what knowledge is and the way it's made. We might believe that knowledge is objective and absolute and we can always know what the right answer is. Transformative learning happens when we encounter new knowledge or have new experiences that won't fit into our existing meaning perspectives.

**Habits of Mind**

Asmara (2020) establishes the concept of transformative learning as a way of fostering religious education. Preliminarily, Asmara reiterates Mezirow’s concept of meaning perspectives, framing them as *habits of mind* and asserting that, “A habit of mind is a way of seeing the world based on our background, experience, culture, and personality. These habits develop over a lifetime. They are rooted in one’s earliest experiences and are shaped through socialization. Habits of mind are uncritically shaped by our families, community, and culture and tend to remain unquestioned unless we encounter an alternative perspective we cannot ignore” (p. 130).

Similarly, OGS permits and encourages adult learners to bring their existing habits of mind with them into the learning environment, reminding students in a nurturing manner that OGS *is a safe place to think*. This welcoming viewpoint serves as the platform upon which further learning is built. From there, OGS prompts students to engage in what Asmara addresses (referencing Mezirow) as performing “*critical reflection* that involves challenging the validity of one’s assumptions about the world, others, and oneself” (p. 131).

**Phases of Transformative Learning**

While Mezirow’s entire theory of transformative learning may not apply across the OGS educational landscape, certainly several of its main tenets fit well with the learning experience at OGS. Transformative learning involves precipitating, facilitating, inhibiting, and reinforcing movement toward a change in a frame of reference: a disorienting dilemma, self-examination of feelings, critical reflection, relating discontent to others, exploring options for new behavior, planning a course of action, gaining knowledge to implement plans, experimenting with new roles, building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and reintegration. At OGS, critical reflection, self-examination and gaining knowledge are exemplified.

According to Carter (2023), **“**Human development requires a continuous negotiation of

loss, as old assumptions, beliefs and meanings encounter new knowledge and the rational and emotional struggle to cope with the threat of re-orienting the embodied system of self and world**”** (p. 30). Adult learners at OGS encounter such negotiations, as long-held assumptions are challenged by new knowledge, resulting in a stretching of old parameters.

**Transformative Education and Values**

Kilag (2023) stresses that, “The integration of transformative education and values education holds great potential for creating transformative learning experiences” (p. 58). The learning experience at OGS allows for transformative experiences because it embraces the students’ prior knowledge while furthering the learning journey in ways that expand upon existing knowledge. By valuing past, present and future knowledge, students are nurtured and their social leadership pursuits are thus fostered.

Miller (2020) adds that, “Participants also have incentives to subject their counter

narratives and ideas to the same rigorous critical reflection they use in dealing with the initial majoritarian narratives, which not only enhances the quality of the resulting ideas but also further reinforces the habits of critical reflection for generative transformation” (p. 291). OGS students are strongly encouraged to read views that are variant to their theses. This relates to Mezirow’s principle of critical reflection for generative transformation. In order to make a good argument, it is necessary to read counterarguments. Interestingly, Miller’s comment above is slightly variant because it demonstrates the kind of overwritten discourse that makes “theories” difficult to comprehend and therefore adopt. Miller’s comment can be critically reflected upon as an example of good research becoming bogged down by verbosity.

**Self-Efficacy and Transformative Adult Learning**

Rogers (2013) [SEMINAL] asserts that, “The experience of self-efficacy and control over one’s life is a necessary, though not sufficient, prerequisite for learning” (p. 20).Students at OGS are propelled on a learning journey that emphasizes self-efficacy and independent study. However, this journey is never travelled without the full support and guidance of faculty tutors.

**Growth and Change**

Critical reflection for transformative learning is greatly enhanced by dialogue. According to Schnepfleitner (2021), “It is only by exposing our ideas or experiences to critical reflection and dialogue and comparing them to the lived experiences of others that we can begin to uncover those biases or reassure ourselves of their objectivity” (p. 45). OGS students regularly engage in dialogue, not only as a means of social connection support, but also to expose one another to varied perspectives. This engagement is constructive and supportive, intended not to suppress existing views but to build on them.

**Conclusion**

Consistent with Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, the learning experience at OGS is transformative, lifting barriers to personal growth and stretching adult learners so that they may create constructive social change. The key takeaway is that an educational environment must help learners actively participate and engage with the concepts presented within the context of their own lives––both independently and with others––in order to critically examine the justification of new knowledge. OGS provides a supportive environment and transformative learning experience from which students can better create constructive social change.

**Works Cited**

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