PHI800 Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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Professor

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**Assignment 3 Essay**

Write a 5-page paper to:

Explain Jack Meirow's transformative learning theory. How does the OGS approach to transformative learning promote critical reflection for transcending barriers to personal growth and social impact?

Paper Outline

a. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.

b. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.

c. End with a conclusion that reaffirms your thesis.

d. Use a minimum of seven scholarly research sources (two books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).

Transformative learning is a significant change in worldviews, perspectives and frame of reference brought about by instrumental and communicative learning. It can be disorienting and meaningful and is integrated into one's life to create new ideas, meaning and new worldviews. Meizrow’s transformative learning theory is rooted in prior experience and worldview of the learner, dialogue, reflective discourse and critical reflection and this approach to learning is in full alignment with OGS’ approach to transformative learning for personal and professional growth of the Christian scholar practitioner.

“The concept of transformative learning was introduced in the field of adult education in 1978 in an article 'Perspective Transformation', published in the American journal Adult Education Quarterly. A major emphasis of critics of transformation theory has been its de-emphasis of social action. Edmund O'Sullivan et al.'s identification of transformative learning with movement toward the realization of a bold conception of a new cosmology moves well beyond the political focus of critical pedagogy. Constructivist developmental psychologists believe that development involves movement through a predictable sequence of 'forms' culminating in the development of the adult capacity, and in some adult learners, the ability and disposition to engage in the transformative processes of critical self-reflection and reflective judgment through discourse” (Mezirow 2018, p. 114).

Experience is the central starting point for transformative learning theory. “Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construct a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action’ (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162). People create meaning for themselves through their experiences, their beliefs, values and general worldview based on their own interpretation and perception of these experiences ( Mezirow, 1991). Experience, dialogue (with self and others) and self-reflection ‘constitutes a starting point for discourse leading to critical examination of normative assumptions underpinning the learner’s value judgments or normative expectations’ (Mezirow,2000, p. 31). This is an important process in transformation and change.

In other words, transformative learning process starts from past experience, you are not starting from zero. This transformative process highlights the importance of creating meaning in the learner’s world. Taylor & Cranton (2013) asked some critical questions about what gives meaning to experience, what is experience and what is not considered experience and how to distinguish transformative experience from other experiences, alluding to the notion of how we know permanent change has taken place and is life altering. Transformative learning is an iterative process that uses learning as a stepping stone for improving and going back and forth to extend understanding that becomes life changing. My experience at Omega so far, has been a transformative one as I have been able to use my life experiences and refocus around spiritual formation. Each learning and in particular the development readings have expanded my theological knowledge. I have been able to relate the learning to my passion for young people, my profession and career and my entire life. The learning has impacted my beliefs about theology without ministerial focus and how we can change the world of others through greater walk and communion with God.

“Historically, three constructs have been seen as central to transformative learning theory, critical reflection, dialogue, and experience (Mezirow, 1991). Learners’ experience, as previously discussed, is seen as socially constructed, as constituting the starting point for dialogue, as the essential medium through which a transformation is promoted and developed, and as leading to critical reflection where learners question ‘the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience’ (Taylor,2009, p. 7). Missing in this tripartite of core components of transformative learning theory is “empathy” which typically is seen as the ability to ‘subjectively experience and share in another psychological state or intrinsic feelings’ (Morse, Anderson, Bottoroff, Yonge, O’Brien, Solberg & McIlveen, 1992, p. 274). As a construct, empathy has been mentioned in the literature as significant to transformative learning, although it is rarely defined or discussed in much depth, particularly in its relationship to the central constructs of transformative learning (Gum, Greenhill & Dix, 2011; Stevens-Long, Schapiro & McClintock, 2012; Taylor, 2007, 1997; Willis, 2012). An example of how empathy is generally referred to is seen in an article by Mezirow where he embeds the term in a list of other facets important to transformative learning. Here he discusses its significance when participating in critical-dialectical discourse of ‘having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, “bracketing” prejudgment, and seeking common ground’ (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60).” (Taylor, & Cranton, 2013, pp. 37)

Though empathy is not readily and explicitly discussed or unpacked by Mezirow, Taylor and Cranton highlight the importance of empathy in the discourse on transformative learning. Empathy is the sharing in others' psychological experience, feeling with other learners in a critical discourse that enforces active and empathic listening and as highlighted by Mezirow ‘bracketing your own assumptions to be able to see and feel with the other person for greater transformation.

“Mezirow’s theory, expressed in lay terms, argues that every individual has a particular view of the world. The particular worldview may or may not be well articulated but it is usually based on a set of paradigmatic assumptions that derive from the individual’s upbringing, life experience, culture or education. When asked to explain their worldview most individuals say, in effect, ‘The world is this way because’. Their explanation is, in turn, based on a set of causal assumptions that are often ingrained and well-rehearsed. If the individual is especially committed to his or her worldview it is highly likely that a proselytizing element will creep in. In that case the individual may argue that ‘The world should be this way’, which is a position grounded in a set of prescriptive assumptions. Mezirow claimed that individuals have difficulty changing because their worldviews become unconscious frames of reference constructed of habits of the mind. He argues that particular points of view can become so ingrained that it takes a powerful human catalyst, a forceful argument or what he calls a disorienting dilemma to shake them” (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Grainger, 2015 pp. 11).

For Mezirow, critical reflection, critical reflection of assumptions and critical self-reflection of an assumption is essential to “understanding how adults learn to think for themselves rather than act on the concepts, values and feelings of others…”For him, reflection is allowing one's thoughts to wander imagining alternatives that present potential to effect changes in one’s established frame of reference and worldview (Mezirow, 1998 pp. 185).

OGS’s approach to transformative learning promotes critical reflection that transcends barriers to personal growth. Personal growth and transformation and world change is the ethos of the Omega Graduate school. Critical reflection is deeply embedded in OGS’s mission and core values. The Mission of Omega Graduate School is to “equip scholar-practitioners, from a Christian perspective, with research skills to integrate religion and society for constructive social change.” Therefore highlighting the importance of transformation as rooted in its learning philosophy.

I was drawn to Omega’s philosophy of academic safety “a safe place to think” which is an important part of learning and critical reflection. This philosophical underpinning promotes critical thinking and reflection that allows for transformative learning through research and questioning deeply rooted beliefs, norms and assumptions based on the learner’s prior worldview and experience. The type of setting of examining beliefs and interrogating and dialoguing for social change is the essence of transformative learning as promoted by Mezirow. My journey with Omega Graduate school has allowed me to look at the world through different lenses; to see my experience of education from a point of transformation, through spiritual formation and interconnected with sociological research knowledge and reimagine change from a different perspective.

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