PHI 800-12: Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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Because I hold various leadership positions, I must admit that I was a little torn between Andragogy because it focuses on the goals and needs of adult learners and includes education, life, skills-sets, and experiences; however, I think the core essential element I favor more so is the Transformative Learning Theory, which allows us to take learning out of our experiences. Jack Mezirow’s concept of critical reflection is acutely rooted in the idea of transformational learning, which suggests that learning encompasses not just adjusting our thinking to new information or skills, but also a fundamental shift in perspective, beliefs, and identity. It is important to note that identity-driven theories of resistance offer a useful model for understanding change in a confined context, but they are not rooted in specific practices that might cause an identity shift (Lerman & Sadin, 2022). Mezirow’s concept, however, centers on the content and process elements, rooted in certain premises. According to Mezirow's theory, emotions are recognized as important aspects of the transformative learning process. While much of his emphasis is on critical reflection, questioning assumptions, and perspective transformation, emotions are often entwined with these cognitive processes.

At this time, I plan to research justice-involved teens, particularly those wrestling with fatherlessness, and using Mezirow’s approach will allow me to engage in critical reflection to make sense of these kids’ experiences and understand how their family backgrounds have shaped their beliefs and behaviors. Critical reflection can involve questioning assumptions about family roles, masculinity, and relationships, and discovering alternative perspectives. His theory might be pertinent to justice-involved youth dealing with fatherlessness as they might have experienced significant disorienting dilemmas related to their identity, family structure, and sense of belonging. Absent fathers can lead to feelings of abandonment, confusion, and loss and these confusing predicaments can serve as catalysts for transformative learning by encouraging people to critically reflect on their experiences and assumptions.

Transformative learning involves exploring alternative perspectives and ways of understanding oneself and the worldview. Justice-involved youth may benefit from exposure to positive male role models, mentors, or therapeutic interventions that test stereotypical notions of masculinity and offer alternative narratives of resilience and strength. Encouraging them to engage in communication with their peers and mentors who have experienced similar challenges can also simplify transformative learning by broadening their perspectives and developing empathy.

Mezirow's model, which suggests that emotions only play a subordinate role, has attained a considerable position in recent times as a basis for democratic change and societal transformative development (Formenti & Hoggan‐Kloubert, 2023). It also emphasizes the importance of acquiring new skills and integrating new perspectives into one's identity, in addition to standing up for injustices and taking action based on newfound insights. For youth in the system dealing with fatherlessness, this may involve developing coping skills for dealing with trauma, developing a sense of agency and empowerment, reconnecting with positive male role models, and setting goals for building healthy relationships and contributing to their communities once they reconnect with the world.

In closing, I have read the Bible numerous times over the years and it tells us that we are not to be conformed to the things of the world, but that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory helps us to do this by strengthening the roots of identified societal problems instead of expanding the branches to what already exists. His model has a substantial impact on those seeking to facilitate personal and social change and his emphasis on critical reflection, perspective transformation, and the socio-cultural context of learning continues to enlighten research and practice in the slow process of growth and human development. By incorporating principles of transformative learning into interventions and programs for justice-involved youth, I will be able to help support those of us seeking efforts to heal, grow, and thrive our youth.

Works Cited

Formenti, L., & Hoggan‐Kloubert, T. (2023). Transformative learning as societal learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, *2023*(177), 105–118. https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20482

Lerman, A. E., & Sadin, M. (2022). Transformational learning and identity shift: Evidence from a campus behind bars. *Punishment & Society*, *25*(3), 683–706. https://doi.org/10.1177/14624745221087702