PHI 800-12: Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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Jack Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory suggests that personal growth and change occur through critical reflection and challenging assumptions. It involves becoming aware of existing perspectives, critically examining them, and developing new ways of thinking and acting. Mezirow emphasizes the importance of experiencing a perplexing problem, prompting individuals to reflect critically on their assumptions and leading to transformative learning. Dialogue with others allows the exploration of different perspectives, challenges, and assumptions, highlighting the significance of critical reflection, open-mindedness, and dialogue in transformative learning. In today's ever-changing educational environment, the quest for transformative learning experiences has become increasingly important, especially for adult learners desiring to broaden their horizons and adopt positive societal changes. Opting for Omega Graduate School (OGS) has proven to be a wise choice for me, as it distinguishes itself as an institution dedicated not only to academic excellence but also to creating an environment conducive to transformative learning. At OGS, adult learners find a safe haven for academic examination, free from unwarranted criticism and judgment, which lays the groundwork for significant personal growth. Additionally, OGS raises interactive discourse that goes beyond surface-level discussions, inspiring students to engage in deep exchanges of ideas. This exchange of perspectives encourages critical self-reflection and openness to diverse viewpoints. Likewise, OGS's integration of biblical concepts into its spiritual framework adds a unique dimension to learning, prompting students to reassess their beliefs in light of enduring truths. By empowering scholars to transform their personal, spiritual, and societal circumstances, OGS offers a more compassionate and inclusive community. This paper examines OGS’s multifaceted approach to transformative learning, demonstrating how the integration of academic excellence, dynamic dialogue, and spiritual integration empowers adult learners within a secure intellectual environment, developing reflective personal and societal transformations.

Proverbs 18:10 proclaims: *"The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."* At the core of transformative learning lies the formation of a secure environment where individuals can freely engage in critical reflection and growth. Safety is a fundamental factor in the transformative learning processes as outlined by Mezirow pinned by Lendrum (2021). Developing an existing perspective, which occurs when new or conflicting information intersects with an individual's framework of understanding, demands a safe environment where individuals can freely explore and integrate these innovative ideas without the anxiety of encountering criticism or negative consequences. Moreover, fostering the development of new viewpoints requires a safe academic space where researchers can openly investigate and accept unique concepts without fear of retaliation or animosity. Since people come from a variety of backgrounds, it is essential to create a safe environment for the process of changing one's actions, behaviors, and beliefs. This will allow students to bravely face strongly held beliefs and embrace change without fear of negative consequences. Peer and OGS staff feedback is critical for a student's development because it highlights how important it is to change one's method of learning. In addition, research and the use of diverse academic research materials are essential components of this life-changing process, enhancing the educational process and broadening one's perspective. Establishing a secure atmosphere that encourages trust and sharing among adult learners promotes honest communication and respect for one another even in the face of conflict. Maintaining academic excellence and integrity and making sure that conversations stay fruitful and thought-provoking are crucial aspects of this process. In the end, appreciating and respecting other points of view fosters an environment of cooperation and understanding, which is crucial for both individual and group development.

In Dr. Howell's (2024) study, the integration of Transformative Learning Theory and Engagement Theory introduces TMID as an innovative approach to encouraging transformative learning experiences, the essential role of technology, similar to OGS's frameworks, in facilitating meaningful engagement and enhancing learning outcomes, emphasizing her commitment to advancing educational practices focused on growth, inclusivity, and empowerment. Despite OGS's commitment to providing a secure environment for adult learners dependent on technology, challenges persist. Technical issues like internet connectivity problems (especially in tornadic weather like we are experiencing at present), glitches, and other malfunctions can interrupt operations and cause unnecessary stress for scholars and educators. As parents and working professionals, distractions, such as multitasking during lessons, might hinder learning effectiveness. Similarly, the lack of in-person interaction in online learning may result in social isolation, posing as a barrier for students to directly engage with instructors. Restricted access to resources and immediate staff support may additionally burden learning advancement. Furthermore, while online instructors may prioritize theoretical concepts over practical application, potentially limiting learning opportunities within certain disciplines, OGS staff are different. They are receptive and open-minded, eager to hear directly from students who are passionate about their professions and interests. This creates an environment where diverse perspectives are not only valued but also actively sought and heard. Addressing these challenges is crucial to developing a beneficial online learning environment for adult students, requiring attention to both technological and instructional barriers.

Secondly, to understand other people's perspectives and experiences, we must engage in active discourse with others. Proverbs 27:17, which says, *"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another,"* serves as an example of this idea. Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory stresses the importance of critical thinking and questioning assumptions. One assumption in educational settings is communicative learning, which is centered on the desire to comprehend and express oneself effectively (Kurnia, 2021). OGS offers an environment where students are encouraged to engage in critical discourse, presenting a platform for vibrant exchanges. Through active involvement in intellectual conversations encompassing diverse viewpoints, students are compelled to critically examine their own and others' perspectives, potentially leading to transformative experiences. Participation in sessions embracing varied perspectives enables students to enhance their comprehension, question rooted convictions, and ultimately experience personal development.

The recent experience of witnessing a young man break down in court, yearning for a closer bond with his absent father, deeply resonated with me. This touching moment shows the importance of authentic expressions of compassion and love, as highlighted in 2021 by Schnepfleitner and Ferreira. Mezirow's examination of the authenticity and implication of these statements stresses the need for engaging in reflective discourse to grasp their true meaning, emphasizing the essential role of clear and direct communication in understanding diverse experiences and beliefs. In their 2023 research article, Musa and Rais probe into the realms of juvenile delinquency and risk factors among adolescents. Effective interviews with several young adults involved in the legal system allowed for the gaining of knowledge about their actions, interactions with the law, and factors that contributed to their engagement in delinquency. It was necessary for researchers to actively converse with participants to get comprehensive answers.

Upon reflecting on my encounters with justice-involved youth, the insightful discussions surrounding youths' experiences within the justice system, irradiate the hurdles confronted by numerous young individuals (Hobbs, 2023). Dialogue and communication emerge as crucial tools in understanding adult learning and societal complexities. Recognizing diverse learning approaches is key, with adults often drawing insights from personal and shared experiences. Mezirow's thoughts share the importance of engaging in dialogue sessions, a practice actively promoted by OGS to build a respectful environment for varied opinions. Adult learners may face barriers in productive conversations due to differing styles, biases, and fear of judgment. Overcoming these challenges requires understanding resistance, anticipating viewpoints, and maintaining composure. As students and staff differ, maintaining a respectful atmosphere entails research, focusing on agreement, patience, and refraining from disrespect. Encouraging open dialogue enables adult learners to share opinions and receive constructive feedback comfortably. Upholding courteous discourse and addressing opposing ideas with honesty and decency are also essential, even amid disagreements.

Finally, spiritual integration is vital for adult learners and change agents because it provides a framework for understanding the deeper meaning of their experiences. Mezirow's concept of transformative learning displays how spiritual examination can spark meaningful shifts in perspective, encouraging personal growth and societal transformation. Contrary to the insights of Greek and Latin philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates, and Seneca, whose wisdom, though valuable, is grounded solely in human reasoning rather than divine revelation (Kokkos, 2020), I find assurance in the belief that spiritual integration, alongside academic excellence and dynamic dialogue, provides a strong background for rounded development and societal advancement. Accepting spiritual integration helps people develop a stronger sense of purpose and connection, which equips them to deal with difficult situations intelligently and resiliently.

At OGS, transformative learning breaks down conventional barriers and gives adult learners the tools they need to tackle significant societal concerns. Encouraged by Ephesians 4:22–24, believers are called to embrace spiritual regeneration and let go of their former selves. OGS students value adult learners' independence because it allows them to pursue their passions and gives them a sense of purpose in effecting change. Students interact with real-world issues such as social justice and environmental sustainability through intensive activities like coursework, research, and community service work. Advanced solutions and support for policy improvements are sparked by collaboration with peers and participants. In the end, OGS's commitment to transformative learning prepares students to take the lead in promoting constructive social change and building a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable world.

Adult learners face obstacles when incorporating spirituality into social change initiatives, such as having fewer resources than earlier generations, which affects their capacity to address urgent issues. The availability of resources can be influenced by several factors, including, psychological health, institutional trust, and involvement with family, politics, and religion. Informed action is further hampered by the lack of comprehensive studies on modern conceptions of spirituality, religion, and civic engagement. It takes skillful casual abilities to bridge the gap between spirituality and civic engagement, which emphasizes the meaning of efficient communication in this attempt. Despite these barriers, adult learners can get through them by making use of their connections within the OGS community, consulting peers' and staff's knowledge (there is a wealth of it amongst the OGS staff), and embracing their sense of purpose. Fleming (2024) suggests that ultimately, adult learners must take action based on their newly formed assumptions and they can make a substantial contribution to the growth of society by promoting these ties and actively participating in the educational process.

In conclusion, Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory lies at the heart of OGS's educational philosophy, promoting a supportive environment for adult learners and displaying the significance of academic excellence, dynamic dialogue, and spiritual integration in facilitating both personal development and societal progress through critical self-reflection. OGS's complete approach empowers adult learners to challenge entrenched viewpoints, embrace fresh perspectives, and actively contribute to the advancement of a fairer and more inclusive society. As evidenced throughout this paper, OGS's unwavering commitment to transformative learning not only enriches individual journeys but also adopts impactful societal change.

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