Transformative Learning and Adult Education

LaKeisha Bryant-Hall

Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Sara Reichard

**Assignment**

**Course Learning Journal**

The journal is a written reflection of your learning journey while working in each course. The

Learning Journal integrates the essential elements of the course within your professional field of

interest. The objective of the course journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, integrating

new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to

communicate with your professor insights gained as a result of the course. The course

learning journal should be 3-5 pages in length and should include the following sections:

1. Introduction – Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate

program as a whole, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.

2. Personal Growth - Describe your personal growth–how the course stretched or

challenged you– and your progress in mastery of course content and skills during

the week and through subsequent readings – what new insights or skills you gained.

3. Reflective Entry - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (or

adaptation and relevant application) of new learning in your professional field.

What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result

of your study?

4. Conclusion – Evaluate the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional,

religious, and educational goals.

As an adult learner, I have come to understand that taking hold of the "why" concept behind our actions and beliefs is essential in our learning journey and this is one of the things that constantly crossed my mind while taking this class. Why do people do what they do? Why do people feel the way they feel? Understanding the “why” of a thing is very significant. Recognizing the importance of integrating emotions with thinking is essential for transformative learning, according to Carl Rogers, who backed for *whole-person* learning, arguing that true learning includes engaging both, the mind and affective scopes. As students coming from various parts of the world and having differing professional backgrounds, this alignment raises a deeper understanding of ourselves and the surrounding creation, paving the way for reflective personal growth and transformation. This class taught me about *andragogy*, which focuses on addressing the needs and objectives of adult learners, deviating from *pedagogy*, which predominantly caters to children's education. As adult learners, we display unique traits and learning preferences, often driven by hands-on application and real-life experiences. Engaging with youth, however, gives us new outlooks and insights, particularly in a dynamic environment where language and terminology change constantly. As adults, it is vital not to lag in this ongoing process of learning and adapting.

Omega Graduate School (OGS) demonstrates an institution that caters to adult learners through transformative learning experiences. Instead of simply absorbing academic content, we are empowered with the ability to support our learning skills, an essential aspect of *andragogy*. At OGS, staff and students are a team; thus, s*ynergogy* emphasizes collaborative learning and creating an academic environment where we learn collectively and from each other. In James 1:22, it is said, *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."* This verse stresses the importance of being open-minded, experiential learning and application, bring into line with Rogers' thinking of whole-person learning. Taking this class before the others is necessary because it helps us to understand how to include our feelings with our thinking, creating a strong foundation for what is to come, including opposing views surrounding various academic disciplines. Thinking with feelings also enhances our understanding and allows us to better retain information. I learn more effectively when visual aids are utilized, and I also benefit from combining emotions into the learning process of course material. I also think maintaining emotional intelligence through this class can help enhance communication skills as we are able to express our thoughts and ideas with emotional awareness, offering better connections with each other. As students, it is important to develop critical thinking skills that include both logical reasoning and empathy, allowing us to explore diverse viewpoints and understand their implications. With new information, that is how we grow, so learning how to think with feeling sets the stage for a more enriching and fulfilling educational experience, making it a valuable prerequisite for further classes.

Knowing that I desire to do my research on absent fathers and justice-involved youth, I must say this class stretched me to reach beyond my thinking and my emotions. Our relationship with our earthly fathers often mirrors our relationship with our Heavenly Father. Just as earthly fathers can be absent or distant, leading to feelings of abandonment or distance, we may project those feelings into our relationship with God. However, biblical reflection reminds us that God is always present and loving, even when we feel distant from Him. In the Bible, we see various examples of fatherhood reflecting aspects of God's character. For instance, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the father's unconditional love and forgiveness mirror God's boundless grace towards us, regardless of our mistakes or distance from Him. Similarly, in Psalm 27:10, it says, *"Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me."* This verse reassures us that even if our earthly fathers fail us, God remains steadfast. However, the challenges of absent or distant earthly fathers can create barriers in our relationship with God. Trust me. I know. We may struggle to trust God's love and provision, feeling unworthy or abandoned. Yet, God invites us to approach Him as a loving Father, offering comfort, guidance, and restoration. Through prayer, reflection on scripture, and seeking support from spiritual mentors or communities, we can overcome these barriers and deepen our relationship with God. Identifying God's unfailing love and presence, even during struggles, can transform how we perceive ourselves and our connection to Him.

  In addition to Jack Mezirow’s approach, I found Jane Vella's principles of adult learning insightful and believe they can guide my study in various ways. Firstly, I plan to conduct interviews or surveys with incarcerated youth to gain a comprehensive understanding of their diverse needs and experiences resulting from absent fathers. By actively listening to their perspectives, I aim to gather valuable insights into the specific challenges they face, which will inform the development of interventions. Recognizing the uniqueness of each case, I will prioritize emotional well-being in research procedures, mainly when addressing sensitive topics such as family dynamics and incarceration. For certain, building trust and relationships with participants is key for facilitating open conversations about their feelings and experiences. It is challenging for teens to share exactly how they feel at times. In addition, I suffer from short-term memory; thus, to enhance my understanding and memory of findings, I will organize my research and data analysis logically. I will also encourage participants to pause and reflect on their experiences, good and bad, of living life without their fathers and the impact it has had on their lives. Incorporating interactive elements into my research framework, such as hands-on activities or reflective exercises, will be vital as instant engagement and motivation are important, as well as, respecting the dignity of all participants throughout the project. I will explore the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral scopes of how these youths are affected. This inclusive approach aims to address the complex impacts of paternal absence on participants' lives.

  I will also emphasize how the research findings can inform policies and initiatives to support such youthful population, predominantly those affected by absent fathers. Aligning research goals with their urgent needs is essential as is clearly defining the roles of researchers, participants, and stakeholders and ensuring understanding among all involved is maintained. I will create a comfortable and highly engaging atmosphere for participants understanding that it is vital, and realizing the role “teamwork” plays, I must have support from OGS staff, my peers, and other stakeholders, including mental health professionals in order to successfully excel in this project. Also, given the heavy nature of the topic of fatherlessness, it is essential that I am creative in my approach and incorporate interactive techniques like music, storytelling, art therapy, or group discussions. Vella also noted the importance of upholding ethical standards and principles in research; thus, involving juveniles in the justice system is paramount, including ensuring confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and prioritizing their well-being. Finally, transparency and integrity in data collection, analysis, and distribution processes are necessary to maintain trust among participants and stakeholders.

Working with incarcerated youth, many without fathers, requires transformative learning, critical reflection, and spiritual integration for their rehabilitation and societal reintegration. Many of them often carry wounds from familial abandonment and societal neglect, resulting in unmerited trauma, behavioral issues, and weakened self-esteem. Creating a safe and supportive learning environment, however, allows them to engage in transformative experiences, addressing the basis of their struggles and offers resilience for positive change. Spiritual practices like meditation and self-reflection give them inner strength, facilitating forgiveness and personal growth. By encompassing transformative learning, critical reflection, and spiritual practices within a supportive context, these youths create a journey of healing and empowerment.

In addition, I have learned these kids possess the ability to educate adults, regardless of their age. While trauma may pose as a hindrance to effective communication and lead to negative coping mechanisms, the justice system offers opportunities for rehabilitation and growth. That is a reason why we refer to our juvenile detention center as “The HOPE Center.” Learning among youth mirrors that of adults, needing nurturing environments conducive to growth, like to fertile soil. People grow where they are planted, so it is our job to plant positive seeds for our youth. While youth exhibit resilience and openness like to children, we as adults may need to unlearn preconceived notions in order to transform. Essentially, the journey of youth and adult learning are connected, each group offering valuable insights and challenges to the other. By recognizing the connection of their experiences and embracing opportunities for growth and transformation, both youth and adults can navigate the complexities of life with greater understanding, empathy, and grace.

Reflecting on this class and my profession, I ponder on the impact of these kids’ personal growth and if not having active fathers affect their ability to participate in transformative learning while behind bars. I also question whether or not the educational setting at our facility allows for total transformative learning and if it is structured to encourage critical thinking and individual growth. These are things I need to assess. Also, I need to look into the support systems we have in place and re-evaluate if we need more direct mentorship programs to solely focus on teens dealing with absent fathers. For our kids who are released into society, I need to see how their transformative experiences while incarcerated aid in their reintegration. Will they continue their educational and mental health programs, and will they have that direct support from caring adults to sustain their transformative journey? I have to examine these questions and find solutions.

Finally, in the spirit of total transparency, this class has prompted me to engage in a level of self-reflection that I have not experienced in quite some time, allowing me to confront both the joys and sorrows of my past and present. While navigating through this class, I found myself shedding tears, not only due to academic frustrations (APA 7) but also because of the emotional depth of sincere self-examination. In the quiet moments of reflection, I thought about how many more young boys and girls I will lose to the adult system or cemetery or how many more kids would come through my doors making ill-willed decisions as a result of having no guidance. I reflected on my life and the lingering father-related wounds that still require God's healing touch. The looming divorce of my parents, after nearly five decades of marriage, weighs heavily on my heart. Discovering the impact of my father's past decisions, which deeply affected my mother, siblings, and me, left me wrestling with a mix of emotions, compounded by the fact that I only learned of these events years later. Reflecting on my advocacy for incarcerated youth, contrasted with my own childhood experiences of victimization, stirred up feelings of abandonment and injustice. Additionally, the loss of my sister, who battled illness for 43 years before passing away two years ago, added another layer of grief to my journey.

Yet, amidst the pain and confusion, God reminded me of my purpose to be an agent of societal change. Despite the scars and struggles, I find comfort in the assurance that everything works together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose, as written in Romans 8:28. This verse serves as a beacon of hope, reaffirming that even amidst life's trials, God is orchestrating a greater purpose beyond my understanding and hence, I am willing to be used by Christ in all areas of my life, and OGS is allowing me to do that.

Continuing my educational journey after being out of school for several years has presented its challenges, but it has also been incredibly rewarding. As an OGS student, I take pride in the unique learning environment provided. The integration of online adult learning, coupled with a safe space for dialogue among peers and staff, has made this experience more manageable and enriching. What sets OGS apart is its emphasis on critical reflection and spiritual approach to learning. This approach not only deepens my understanding of the subject matter but also enhances personal growth and spiritual development. The abundance of research resources available and the opportunity for transformation through learning are unmatched. Overall, my experience as an OGS student has been transformative, equipping me with the tools and support needed to navigate this educational journey with confidence and enthusiasm.