Assignment #3 – Instructor Assigned Essay

“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?”

PHI 800-12: Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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**Instructor Assigned 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 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?

● 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

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).

“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?”

**Introduction**

Adult learning has exploded across the globe as a result of technology, population growth, and the need for more knowledge, skills, and qualifications to meet the demands of today’s rapidly growing and changing market. Many adults have sought diverse educational opportunities to enhance their skills and earnings in a highly competitive market. The focus on adult learning is not new, and early as the 1990s when the Internet and technology brought new opportunities for adult learners, questions regarding the way adults learn and the best learning strategies rapidly emerged, and have continued into present times where the number of programs and schools have increased tremendously, not only nationally, but globally.

Andragogy or the methods and principles used in adult learning are well-established today even though new ideas and recommendations for practice will continue to emerge and affect how we approach teaching adult. One theory of adult learning that emerged strongly and has made significant impact since its birth in 1978 and has gained prominence in the 1990s, is Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). Jack Mezirow was an American sociologist who was Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. He died at the age of 91 years in 2014, and has been credited with transforming our understanding of adult education more than any other scholar of his era. Mezirow believed in taking adult education beyond the mastery of basic skills to focus on personal transformation that facilitate the growth and development of adult learners. While his theory has been very popular, it has not been without criticism and even further development by other scholars.

**What is Transformative Learning Theory?**

The origins of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) is critical to understanding its founder’s purpose and focus. It is said that Jack Mezirow developed his theory of transformative learning or adult learning during the 1970s when his wife Edee enrolled as an undergraduate student at Sarah Lawrence College. It is said that being inspired by his wife’s experience, Jack Mezirow initiated an extensive study of the factors that characteristically impede or facilitate adult learners, especially women in their learning (Levine, 2014). According to Mezirow (1978), the adult learners underwent personal transformation which emerged in a series of change, which he published as Transformative Learning Theory in the *American Education Quarterly (AEQ)*, where he emphasizes the value of one’s experience and its impact on learning. According to Mezirow (1978),

[Awareness of one’s own history and reliving it] leads to a process of perspective transformation involving a structural change in the way we see ourselves and our relationships. If the culture permits, we move toward perspectives which are more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience. We move away from uncritical, organic relationships toward contractual relationships with others, institutions and society. Perspective transformation reformulates the criteria for valuing and for taking action. Behavior change is often a function of such transformation. In this emerging transformation theory, adult education finds its own inherent goals and functions (p. 100).

Kurnia (2021) agrees wholly with this view, especially when it comes to adults needing a frame of reference to fully embed learning experience and understanding. Above, Mezirow (1978) spells out all of the elements of effective adult learning strategy or theory: experience, awareness, transformation of individual perspective, inclusiveness, integrative experience, contractual relationships with institutions, and behavior change.

While Mezirow’s explanation is filled with rich ideas and concepts, the concept of Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) can simply be defined as a theory of adult learning which explains how adult learners make meaning of their experiences and change their worldviews. As Mezirow (1997) notes, “A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience” (p. 5). How we understand and treat our experience in a new context and in light of new ideas and knowledge affect how much we can learn, understand, and apply in our work and life. Adult learning should focus on practice and personal growth and development (Mezirow, 1996). Mezirow is correct because “To help people learn, we must first know about their current knowledge and beliefs. Achieving that, we must know what generates a change in such brain networks. And for stable learning we must know what leads to long-term change – to memory” (Fried, 2023, p. x).

**Phases of Learning According to Jack Mezirow**

Mezirow (1997, 1996, 1995 and 1991) believes that there are ten (10) phases of transformative learning to include: (1) a disorienting dilemma, (2) self-examination of feelings, (3) critical reﬂection, (4) relating discontent to others, (5) exploring options for new behavior, (6) planning a course of action, (7) gaining knowledge to implement plans, (8) experimenting with new roles, (9) building competence and self-conﬁdence in new roles and relationships, and (10) reintegration (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023, p. 28-29).

According to Moran and Moloney (2022), “By using reflective accounts, which were structured using Mezirow’s 10 phases of transformative learning, respondents were able to describe their views, insights, opinions and experiences” (p. 1). As such, Moran and Moloney (2022) have identified several important factors that affect adult learning: “personal circumstances, career, qualifications, personal growth, and confidence, all of which provided significant evidence of the achievement of transformative learning among the full-time mature student respondents in this research” (Moran & Moloney, 2022, p. 1). Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning describes the expansion of individuals’ consciousness through the transformation of basic worldview and specific self-capacities (Elias, 1997). As such, transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes which include appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious, as well as critically analyzing underlying premises (Elias, 1997).

**Criticism of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory**

Mezirow has both advocates and critics. “[T]he strongest criticism of Mezirow’s (1978) transformative learning theory [is] that it promoted a focus on the rational (intellectual) dimension of cognition while neglecting the extra-rational dimensions, including the emotional dimension” (Carter & Nicolaides, 2023, p. 25). This is especially where many critics argue that Mezirow ignores the social activism side of adult learners and how this drives their behaviors and approach and choice of learning. Mezirow theory has been criticized as being too rationalistic owing to what some scholars such as Boyd and Myers (1988) perceive as its view of deliberation and critical thinking as the primary driver of change. On the other hand, scholars such as Cunningham (1992) and Inglis (1997) have criticized Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning as being too focused on individual rather than social or collective transformation.

Critics such as Kokos (2020) argue that Jack Mezirow was not able to “convincingly argue that transformative learning had an adequate understanding of the social dimension of learning partly because he did not take onboard the full corpus of Habermas’ critical theory whose work grounds critical reflection and discourse in interpersonal relationships” (*Foreword*, xv). In other words, while Mezirow observed and studied adult learners, he should have recognized how much who and what people are and how they define their experiences matter even more than simple growth and development. Adult learners have established beliefs, experiences, and knowledge that can affect their receptivity to learning. Therefore, having some understanding of how learning occurs in individuals and how such is shaped by their prior knowledge, experiences, and beliefs allow the adult educator to guide learners more effectively and successfully.

Some critics have regarded Jack Mezirow’s theory of adult learning as one that is constrained because “Mezirow puts less emphasis on the fostering of transformative learning and describes adult learning as an organised effort to assist learners who are old enough to be held responsible for their acts to acquire or enhance their understanding, skills, and dispositions” (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021, p.89). However, adults learning still depend heavily on individuals’ recognition of the need for change, and adult learners are mainly driven by strategies that sustain and promote this.

**OGS Approach to Transformative Learning**

The OGS approach to transformative learning is an example of the application of adult learning that promotes critical reflection for transcending barriers to personal growth and social impact by giving learners opportunities to engage both their religious and social experience vital to their own personal growth and development. Integrating spiritual, intellectual, experience and social and community roles and responsibilities, students are educated to transform their lives and their worldviews. The OGS approach builds on students’ existing skills and experience and provides the students with a pathway to develop to their fullest. This is reflected in focus on Course Essential Elements (CEEs) vital in gaining and developing new insights and understanding while applying newly learned concepts and theories in practical and real-world roles and responsibilities such as one’s vocation or job. Adult learners need context, but they also need to be independent while needing support and opportunities to test and apply what they learn in ways meaningful to their lives and self-mission and vision. The OGS approach engenders this, and this is what motivates its students – they all want to make a difference – and as adult learners, they see the OGS experience as a whole approach that embodies all of what Mezirow envisions for adult learners and more.

**Conclusion**

Over the last four decades, the focus on ‘transformative dimensions of learning’ has produced an ever-diverse array of theories, approaches, concepts, and insights about the purposes, processes, and outcomes of dramatic human change (Hoggan & Finnegan, 2023). Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning has been re-evaluated in light of the many changes that characterize learning today, including globalization and issues of climate change, inequalities, misogyny, racisms, neoliberalism and other opportunities that do not just affect learning, but act as what Kokkos (2020) calls an “existentialist threat.” In light of new ideas about learning, the degree to which Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning can still be applied and regarded as formidable can be questioned.

Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning provides opportunities for adult educators to foster opportunities for their adult students to use their experiences to transform how they learn and understand things. Transformative learners must engage in critical thinking and critical reflection simultaneously in order to better understand self, others, and the world. In Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning some of the conditions for transformative learning include fostering learner-centered opportunities, participation, as well as interaction in learning environments. Educators must encourage voluntary discourse so that learners are able to examine and validate assumptions, values, beliefs, ideas and feelings. Also, it is very important to foster high levels of dialogue and engage problem solving (Schnepfleitner & Ferreira, 2021).

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