Transformative Learning and Adult Education

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Assignment #3 – 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).

The transformative learning theory was created by Jack Mezirow. There are several steps to this theory. The aim of the theory is to explore how effective adult learning looks .The theory ranges from the discovery of a societal problem to mastering competence and reintegration into one’s life. Omega Graduate School has adopted said theory in their teaching practices. Omega Graduate School approach to transformative learning promotes critical reflection for transcending barriers to personal growth and social impact by guiding learners through a critical assessment of sociocultural assumptions, recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change, and acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plan.

Part of the application process for admission into Omega Graduate School is completing an essay that focuses on an area of social change the student intends to explore during their tenure as a graduate student. I personally had some traction with Dear Black Man Breathe, a program aimed at giving collegiate black males an opportunity to express emotional/ social issues with resources to navigate through those challenges. One of the first conversations I had with faculty when I was admitted into the school was potential ways to expand Dear Black Man Breathe. I had not considered that DBM was a DEI ( diversity, equity, and inclusion) program. Furthermore I was unaware of the implications of the correlation between mental health and collegiate retention/ success. Omega Graduate School offers a contextualized degree which afford the opportunity to have a very niche collegiate experience.

“Adult learners themselves view learning to think as autonomous, responsible persons as an important educational objective. For example, the U.S. National Institute for Literacy (Stein, 1995) found that those who participate in literacy programs do so to (1) gain access to information so they can orient themselves in the world; (2) give voice to their ideas, with the confidence they will be heard; (3) make decisions and act independently; and (4) build a bridge to the future by learning how to learn. Their goal is to become autonomous” (Mezirow) .

For me, entering into a graduate program was a means to give voice to my ideas. I think digging deeper I was aware of a social problem but did have the context or jargon to properly express the issue or the gravity of the detriment that would be caused if the issue was not immediately addressed. I had done some equity work with Baltimore County Public Schools but it was not impactful. I was not allowed to investigate the topic beyond what was needed to complete a particular task. Now that I am studying at OGS I am able to act independently with the ultimate goal of being completely autonomous.

One of the aspects of education that I have always found to be contradictory is that there is an emphasis on critical thinking, however tests that seek right/ wrong answers do not leave space for that skill to be honed. "Reification refers to the apprehension of human phenomena…The aim of transformative learning is to liberate individuals from these forces. The process used is communicative and emancipatory action. (Scott). Transformative learning beckons the learner to lean into their intuition, consequently giving them permission to analyze and evaluate their societal constructs. It is almost laughable to think that as autonomous beings one needs permission to think freely, but not only is it needed, it is a rare occasion adding to the uniqueness of an OGS education.

Another way Omega Graduate School promotes critical reflection is aiding students to recognize that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change. If I may be bold, I believe one of the ways God leads us to our calling is through vexation. He allows certain matters to tug at our heart and minds in a personal way. This vexation easily feels isolating. When I discovered the gaps in black male collegiate retention I felt as if I was the only person who noticed. What’s more, I felt like I was the only one who cared about black men and their mental health. That myth was debunked during the first course I took here at OGS. The research for the developmental readings quickly showed me that not only were their other people bothered by it, institutions had complete research studies into the very topic. Profoundly, the George Floyd riot which was the catalyst for my journey into black men’s mental health was the very same riot that sparked numerous critical analyzes and investigations. “Our frames of reference are transformed through critical reflection on the assumptions where our interpretations, beliefs, and points of view are based.”(Kurnia). During my research for my first developmental reading assignment it caused for great critical reflection. I found myself evaluating my own implicit biases as a person of color and as a Christian. I had to consider the state of my heart and the lack of grace I extended to others.Through my research I had to pray forgiveness, at one point I was blind to the problems and so grace and answer to the call to spread awareness and advocate became my posture. The key ingredient with the OGS approach to learning is the self-directed aspect. Honestly at first it was a very jarring experience that nearly led to my demise as a student. I have come to not only understand the rhythm of self- directed learning but appreciate it. “My experience tells me that self-directed learning has been a concept present in theory, discussions, and exchange of views, but seldom systematically put to practice in adult education”(Loeng). Prior to attending OGS I would have agreed with the author. Oftentimes, even in continuing education, there are still expected outcomes that hinder true self-directed learning.

The final way that Omega Graduate School promotes critical reflection is by providing opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills to implement one’s plan. When applying for entry into my masters program I had to explain what social change I hope to make upon graduation. The contextualized degree demands a high level of self reflection and recalibration. “But in contemporary societies we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others. Facilitating such understanding is the cardinal goal of adult education. Transformative learning develops autonomous thinking (Mezirow).” The beauty of the program layout at OGS is it forces me to analyze every angle of the social program I am honing. It beckons me to hold myself accountable to my purpose, to my walk with God, and how my role in society coincides with that call. If God blesses us with spiritual gifts, and purpose us to help others in divinely unique ways, then regardless to societal expectations and standards, the priority has to be God. In another course I learned about Imago Dei, a concept foreign to me before taking the class. Grasping the concept of Imago Dei propelled me into autonomous thinking.”New paradigms are emerging which provide a basis for theorizing adult education in terms of cognitive processes in social movements. These have general implications for our understanding of adult education's role in society.( Holford).” Adult education is shifting. The role of adult education is evolving on a social level. We are in an era where compartmentalization is antiquated. Now the multidimensional, multifaceted being is welcomed and the value of those varied experiences are integrated into education. Correspondingly, educators of color are suited to teach students of color and serve as their role models due to their ability to better understand the students’ backgrounds and experiences. In essence, culturally responsive teaching can be identified by several key characteristics, including being emancipatory, transformative, empowering, multi-dimensional, and validating. (Pierson, 2024). This debunks the myth that my role advocating for black males is a cop out because I am also black. This makes me feel empowered and equipped. I have always struggled with imposter syndrome. Having my education at OGS offer opportunities for constant feed back and reflection allows me to kill that thought daily.

Ultimately Omega Graduate School transcends barriers because at the core of every program is the answer to a call from God. Every course is aimed at empowering and equipping students with the resources and tools to effectively carry out social change. “Transformative learning happens when what I learn changes who I am. (Capofreddi , 2024)”

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