OGS: The Scholastic Approach to the Transformative Learning Theory

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**Introduction**

Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory explains how individuals change their perspectives through critical reflection and experiential learning, leading to profound personal and intellectual growth. Central to the theory is that transformative learning begins with a disorienting dilemma – an event or experience that challenges deeply held beliefs and assumptions. Through critical self-reflection, dialogue, and integrating new insights, individuals reconstruct their worldviews and adopt more inclusive and adaptive ways of thinking. Mezirow’s theory emphasizes the importance of fostering critical thinking, open-mindedness, and empowerment, making it a cornerstone of adult education and a robust framework for personal and social change.

**Transformative Learning Theory: A Framework**

Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory is a framework for understanding how adults undergo profound shifts in perspective through critical reflection and learning experiences. This theory emphasizes how individuals question and reformulate their deeply held assumptions and beliefs, often due to encountering significant life events or challenges, known as disorienting dilemmas. The process culminates in a transformation of understanding, leading to more inclusive, adaptive, and autonomous worldviews. Transformative learning is a cornerstone of adult education, emphasizing personal growth and developing critical thinking skills. Mezirow defines transformative learning as

“ an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one’s beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particularly premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to take action based on the new perspective, and a desire to fit the new perspective into the broader context of one’s life” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 161).

**Phases of Transformative Learning**

The transformative learning phases, according to Mezirow, are (2000, p. 22):

* A disorienting dilemma;
* Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
* A critical assessment of assumptions;
* Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
* Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;
* Planning a course of action;
* Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans;
* Provisional trying new roles;
* Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
* A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspectives.

This writing will not deal with all phases, only disorienting dilemmas, critical reflection and perspective transformation, dialogue and social interaction, and reintegration and action.

**The Role of Disorienting Dilemmas**

The transformative learning process often begins with a disorienting dilemma, a challenging experience that disrupts an individual’s existing frame of reference. These disorienting dilemmas usually entail a significant life event or experience that disrupts a person's worldview. Personal crises, cultural shifts, or professional challenges can trigger these dilemmas. The discomfort and uncertainty caused by these dilemmas catalyze reflection and growth. They will, at times, create emotional and cognitive tension necessary to drive deeper reflection and an exploration of alternative perspectives. The discomfort caused by disorienting dilemmas is often the catalyst that prompts change. This tension, usually referred to as cognitive dissonance, pushes individuals to resolve the conflict between their established beliefs and their new reality. While disorienting dilemmas can be challenging, they also present opportunities for profound personal growth.

**Critical Reflection and Perspective Transformation**

**Critical Reflection**

Critical reflection is at the core of Mezirow’s theory, which examines one’s beliefs, values, and assumptions. Through this process, learners challenge the validity of their beliefs and consider alternative perspectives. It requires that individuals be introspective and honestly identify biases and question the validity of their frameworks. Critical reflection often arises in response to a disorienting dilemma as individuals struggle to reconcile new experiences with their existing worldview. This is the most crucial stage within the transformative learning theory phases for achieving perspective transformation.

**Perspective Transformation**

Perspective transformation is the stage where old patterns of thoughts are replaced with new, more inclusive understandings. Individuals must shift fundamentally in how they view themselves, their relationships, and their worldviews. When fully embraced, this transformation stage often leads to more inclusive, adaptive, and autonomous ways of thinking. Critical reflection and perspective transformation are intricately connected, and together, they foster personal growth and have broader social implications. Individuals who submit themselves to this transformative process often become more empathetic, adaptive, and engaged in addressing societal issues. Together, these processes enable learners to navigate challenges, embrace growth, and contribute to creating a more equitable and thoughtful society.

**Dialogue and Social Interaction**

**Dialogue**

In Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory, dialogue is a critical process that facilitates the validation and refinement of new perspectives. Dialogue allows individuals to engage in meaningful conversations with others, providing a platform to test their evolving beliefs, challenge assumptions, and explore alternative viewpoints. This interactive process is essential for fostering mutual understanding and uncovering biases that might not be apparent through solitary reflection. Mezirow emphasizes that dialogue must occur in an environment of trust and respect, where participants feel safe to share their experiences and ideas without fear of judgment.

Through critical discourse, individuals gain insights from diverse perspectives, enhancing their critical reflection and deepening their transformative learning experience. Dialogue's collaborative nature encourages individuals to consider multiple viewpoints, compare experiences, and arrive at a more informed and inclusive understanding. Ultimately, dialogue bridges individual reflection and social validation, solidifying the transformative learning process and fostering meaningful change.

**Social Interaction**

Social interaction is a vital component of Mezirow’s theory, serving as a medium through which individuals engage with others to expand and refine their perspectives. Through meaningful interactions, learners encounter diverse viewpoints and experiences that challenge their assumptions and beliefs. These interactions often act as catalysts for critical reflection, enabling individuals to see beyond their frames of reference and consider alternative interpretations. Mezirow highlights that social interaction fosters a collaborative environment where learners can exchange ideas, share experiences, and engage in constructive discourse, all essential for perspective transformation.

Moreover, social interaction provides the necessary validation and support for integrating new perspectives. Discussing emerging ideas with others allows individuals to test the validity of their transformed beliefs and gain confidence in their newfound understanding. It also reinforces the importance of empathy and mutual respect, as listening to and understanding others’ perspectives encourages more inclusive and adaptive thinking. Social interaction, therefore, is not only a cornerstone of transformative learning but also a pathway to fostering meaningful connections and societal change.

**Integration and Action**

**Integration**

Integration is the final and critical phase within Mezirow’s theory, where individuals incorporate their transformed perspectives into their lives through action and behavior. After undergoing essential reflection and perspective transformation, learners must align their thoughts, decisions, and actions with their new understanding. This stage involves developing strategies, acquiring the necessary skills, and confidently applying the transformed perspective in real-world contexts. Without integration, the transformative process remains incomplete, as meaningful change requires a shift in thinking and a corresponding shift in practice.

**Action**

If integration is the final phase in the transformational learning phase, action is the culmination of the process, where individuals implement changes based on their newly transformed perspectives. This stage involves translating critical reflection and perspective transformation into concrete behaviors and decisions that align with the individual’s worldview. Action is a crucial measure of the authenticity and depth of the transformation, as it signifies the ability to move beyond theoretical understanding to practical application. Whether it’s altering one’s habits, advocating for change, or adopting new roles, action demonstrates the integration of learning into real-life contexts.

**OGS Breaking Barriers**

OMEGA Graduate School (OGS) is committed to being a pioneer institution in educating adult learners. OGS has gone to great lengths to carefully move beyond any barriers preventing individuals and organizations from advancing in this arena. Three such obstacles that come to mind that OGS has been intentional about overcoming and helping the student population overcome are institutional barriers, ineffective dialogue and communication, and emotional barriers. Each obstacle comes with its own baggage that stifles the growth of individuals and organizations.

Many traditional institutions stick to rigid sets of norms, often based on outdated and ineffective methods of admissions and instruction, among many other areas. Unlike conventional institutions, OGS has not resisted progressive changes to help advance the learning process for its faculty, staff, and students. OGS encourages students to question the status quo based on its mission, and it promotes and highly encourages students to do so.

OGS looks to foster communication and open-mindedness by facilitating opportunities for students to engage with one another and hear from different perspectives to have a meaningful discourse that promotes the institution's and society's well-being. OGS encourages the idea of bringing other voices to the conversation and getting students comfortable with hearing different voices through developmental reading assignments where students are encouraged to find “variant” sources that speak differently on subjects they are researching.

With its emphasis on creating social researchers, OGS believes in instilling confidence in the student population. The faculty of OGS does everything within its power to ensure the students are given every opportunity to be successful in their classes. This helps to increase students’ self-efficacy and their belief in achieving academic success they might not have been able to achieve at another institution.

**Conclusion**

As OGS puts itself forward as one of the pioneering progressive institutions in bringing change to the adult learning landscape through the employment of the Transformative Learning Theory, it will be essential for it to foster meaningful personal growth and drive societal change intentionally. Creating supportive environments, encouraging open dialogue, and promoting opportunities for reflection are key strategies for breaking through any barriers that might hinder students' academic and personal success. OGS must stay on the cutting edge of this endeavor because when students are empowered to question assumptions, embrace diverse perspectives, and integrate their new understanding into action, they unlock the potential for authentic transformation. This enriches the student, brings value to the institution, and helps contribute to a more equitable, empathetic, and adaptive society.

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