

45th Annual Conference Proceedings

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Virtual

Editors: Joann S. Olson, Kemi Elufiede, and Lauren Murray-Lemon

What is AHEA?

The purpose of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance (AHEA) is to help institutions of higher education develop and sustain learning environments and programs suitable for adults.

AHEA does this by:

- Providing a forum for professional educators to share resources and information about alternative degree programs on a national and international level.
- Stimulating practitioner research, thereby contributing to the integration of theory and practice and promoting the improved quality of our efforts.
- Serving as a vehicle for cooperative consultation and collaboration among professionals in the field.
- Integrating the interests and concerns from a variety of areas within adult higher education including distance, international, and liberal education.
- Promoting rights of adult students.
- Influencing institutional and public policies concerning the principles of quality practice applied to adult education.
- Promoting cultural diversity and multicultural perspectives and maintaining that commitment through the incorporation of such perspectives into the policies, procedures, and practices of alternative degree programs for adults.

Letter from the Editors

Dear Reader,

We are pleased to present the Proceedings of the 45th annual conference of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance (AHEA), held virtually in March 2021. We wish to extend special thanks to the AHEA Board of Directors, members, and contributors. Without their support, this publication would not be possible.

To the AHEA Board of Directors, thank you for your continuous efforts to support mission of AHEA through your outreach, service, and perseverance. To the members of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance, you are the reason we do what we do, and you are the backbone of AHEA's growth, networking, and collaboration. Thank you for your membership and participation in our organization and at our conference each year.

To those who contributed papers for these Proceedings, thank you for contributing your research, theory, and practice to our collective knowledge. Through your work, collected in this document, we can strengthen our efforts to educate and serve adult learners in a variety of contexts. We appreciate your service to the larger community of professors, educators, and practitioners. This year, especially, we acknowledge your extra effort to compose these papers while navigating all the uncertainties of COVID-19. Thank you.

As AHEA continues to grow, we are always seeking new ways to contribute our shared endeavor of educating adults. Your feedback and ideas for expanding our impact matters; we look forward to hearing from you. Enjoy your read of the variety of engaging topics related to Adult and Higher Education.

Thank You,

Joann, Kemi, and Lauren

Welcome from the AHEA President

Thank you for your interest in the Proceedings of the 45th annual conference of the Adult and Higher Education Alliance. This year's conference theme, transformative learning, is based on the 2021 book in the AHEA Book Series: *Transformative Learning in Healthcare and Helping Professions Education: Building Resilient Professional Identities*. The book and the conference highlights what we have all experienced this year: Lifelong learning is the key to becoming resilient in challenging times.

Our time together allowed us to explore this theme as graduate students, faculty, administrators, and practitioners. During the conference, we had the opportunity to hear about widely varying approaches to the best practices related the intersection of transformative learning, health professions, and a variety of other settings. Through these proceedings, you can join this conversation!

Make plans to join us for next year's conference, which is held every year in March. Find more information at www.ahea.org

Kathy Penno, Ph.D.
President, AHEA, 2020-2021

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An Analysis of the Role of Communities of Practice in Transformational Learning during a Pandemic

Nighet Ahmed & Ava Tabb

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound global impact on educational institutions, ushering in an era of unparalleled challenges for students and educators. There is a dearth of research on the effects of the pandemic on higher education institutions, underscoring an urgent need to explore measures that can mitigate these effects (Piotrowski & King, 2020). Thus, the purpose of the current paper is to present a brief overview of (1) the transition from face-to-face teaching to online teaching during a pandemic which is the “disorienting dilemma” leading teachers to critical reflections about their assumptions and frames of reference, and (2) highlight new perspectives that emphasize the value of Communities of Practice (CoP) where educators can provide support and share their concerns, expertise, and knowledge.

Key Words: COVID-19, communities of practice, pandemic

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic catapulted an unprecedented phenomenon of worldwide lockdowns where researchers and academics had to reinvent and reorganize educational practices, relying heavily on digital platforms (Nascimento & Lopes, 2020). As the pandemic spread across the globe, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, and massive lockdowns disrupted higher education systems worldwide. Consequently, Spring 2020 proved to be a watershed year for higher education institutions and academics with the rapid transition from face-to-face teaching to emergency remote teaching (ERT; Hollweck & Doucet, 2020). Though e-learning or distance learning which employs technology and digital tools where students are physically separated from teachers has been gaining momentum in recent years (Nascimento & Lopes, 2020, Piotrowski & King, 2020), ERT is activated in a crisis as a temporary solution to face-to-face learning (“Emergency Remote Teaching vs. Online Learning,” 2020). There is a consensus among researchers that online/distance learning is different from ERT. Bates defined the former as, “A form of distance education in which a course or program is intentionally designed in advance to be delivered fully online” (as cited in Johnson et al., 2020). On the other hand, the educational crisis created by the pandemic forced educators to adopt ERT with little advanced planning, training, and in some instances with a lack of institutional support (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Rapanta et al., 2020). Commenting on the viability of ERT, Johnson et al. (2020) stated:

While emergency remote teaching enabled many students to continue the spring semester amidst the pandemic, this form of education is not a viable long-term solution. Going

forward, institutions need to develop sustainable educational plans that can withstand the challenges and unknowns of the ongoing pandemic. (p. 16)

The Impact of the Pandemic on Higher Education Institutes (HEIs)

Though ERT may have been the most noticeable impact of the pandemic, there are other short and long-term effects on HEIs (Hollweck & Doucet, 2020; Johnson et al., 2020; Piotrowski & King, 2020). Piotrowski and King (2020) postulated that the challenges and implications presented by COVID-19 on higher education are titanic and will generate much academic research.

Pandemic pedagogies. The International Institute of Education (IIE) conducted the COVID-19 Snapshot Survey Series to study the effects of COVID-19 on HEIs in the United States. The third report in the series titled, COVID-19 Effects on U.S. Higher Education Campuses: New Realities for Global Student Mobility in Summer and Fall 2020 stated that “In summer 2020, U.S. institutions began the semester with new realities ... 86% of HEIs changed their mode of instruction in summer 2020 from previous semesters” (Martel, 2020, p. 2-3). While 73% of HEIs offered virtual instruction, only 20% provided a hybrid modal of face-to-face and online instruction in summer 2020. It was also reported that for the institutional operations in that semester, 76% of all on-campus events were canceled and approximately 25% of HEIs indicated that all campus facilities or dorms were closed. Additionally, the report projected that for fall 2020, 92% of institutions will adopt a different approach than in the previous semesters with 87% of colleges and universities planning on hybrid instruction (Martel, 2020).

Johnson et al. (2020) noted that the impact of COVID-19 on HEIs has been widespread, citing UNESCO’s estimate in March 2020 that within two months 850 million students worldwide had transitioned from face-to-face learning to online learning. The study examined the experiences and approaches of U.S. faculty and administrators in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants included 897 faculty and administrators from 672 public and private postsecondary institutions in the United States. The results indicated that even with prior online teaching experience, at least 50% of faculty reported adopting new teaching methods and 93% recounted modified teaching practices like decreasing workload, ungrading, and lowering work expectations for students. They reported that “a large volume of faculty respondents expressed feelings of stress and anxiety” (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 16). In addition to recommending online professional development for faculty, the authors suggested support structures such as the establishment of communities of practice. On a similar note, Hollweck and Doucet (2020) emphasized the need for professional collaboration. They recommend that teachers need to help each other and thereby build a collective efficiency, which in turn will lead to their overall well-being.

Critical reflections and transforming perspectives. Beyond changing pedagogies, the pandemic has also had a major impact on the interpersonal and mental health of students and educators alike and has exasperated socioeconomic and racial inequities. Berry et al. (2020) contended that the pandemic has impacted people differently and brought to light major

inequities in the educational system. Citing the proverb, “Never let a crisis go to waste” they recommended a three-pronged approach that emphasizes strengthening teacher leadership, rethinking programs, and transformation through collaboration. Reflecting on the social and emotional issues of students and educators, Johnson et al. (2020) noted that systemic holes around equity in educational systems “have become more visible” during the pandemic. They suggest that moving forward requires compassion, collective rethinking, and a more wholesome approach.

A report by UNESCO’s International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC) highlighted the immediate impact of COVID-19 on the many players in HEIs including students, faculty, non-teaching staff, and the higher education system as a whole. According to the report the pandemic has impacted students differently shedding light on existing inequalities and warning of new ones that will arise. The report cautions of significant medium and long-term effects of the pandemic that are currently not clear. The authors offer a reference framework for governments and HEIs to plan an exit strategy out of the current crisis. Among other principles within the framework, the researchers recommend not only rethinking and redesigning the teaching and learning processes but also highlight the need for creating mechanisms for supporting disadvantaged students (COVID-19-EN-090420-2.Pdf, n.d.)

Similarly, Harper and Sharpe (2020) admitted several benefits of online education but also stressed the disadvantages of this instructional modality for disadvantaged, nontraditional students. They presented their experiences of transitioning to online teaching at a large urban public university serving a diverse, but fairly underserved student body situated in one of the early epicenters of COVID-19. Harper and Sharpe emphasized the importance of community and meaningful relationships between faculty and students and between fellow students. They cautioned that online teaching would cause isolation and alienation, stating that, “some of our students are already alienated from their communities, and we worry about what happens when they never experience the joy of learning in a community.” Piotrowski & King (2020) highlighted budgetary issues and the lack of technological infrastructure in HEIs which have been compounded by the pandemic and which determine the success or failure of these institutions. Additionally, they noted the toll on students who may lack the necessary technological skills, tools, and reliable internet access or may face serious financial issues because of lost assistantships and internships. Similarly, employees may be furloughed when universities face budgetary shortfalls. Filho (2020) asserted that the long-term success of many universities is not only limited to overcoming financial challenges but also involves issues of sustainability. He asserted that the current crisis offers a rare chance for HIEs to revisit and revise some of the business models and offered a five-point plan towards more sustainable development.

Transformative Learning Theory in the Context of the COVID-19 Crisis

Transformative Learning Theory, which holds a prominent position in the field of adult education, has significant implications in the context of the current educational crisis caused by COVID-19. Transformative learning theory was developed by Jack Mezirow during a personal

crisis which he referred to as a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991, p. xvi). A crisis or a disorienting dilemma is a catalyst that sparks critical reflection and reassessment of one’s longstanding assumptions (Baumgartner, 2001; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor & Hamdy, 2013). Interestingly, another factor that contributed to the development of the transformative learning theory was a challenging educational experience that Mezirow’s wife experienced when she returned to college after a long hiatus (Mezirow, 1991). Her experience and those of other women returning to HEIs inspired Mezirow to conduct a national study (sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education) that consisted of structured interviews with eighty-three women. The study led to the formulation of the term *perspective transformation* to explain how these women developed new ways of responding to the “disorienting dilemma” or the challenges they experienced in their new educational setting (Mezirow, 1991, 2009).

Mezirow described the transformation as a ten-phase process (Mezirow, 1991, 1994, 2009). Based on their life experience adults create meaning schemes, assumptions, and frames of reference through a complex cognitive process that involves reasoning (Sandlin et al., 2011). The phases of transformation are initiated by a personal crisis (disorienting dilemma) which leads to critical reflection and re-evaluation of one’s assumptions when they become dysfunctional in a crisis (Baumgartner, 2001). Thus learning can be described as a process of revised interpretation of one’s experiences and perspective transformation that directs future action (Mezirow, 2009). In other words,

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more valid or justified to guide action. (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8)

Mezirow and other proponents of transformative learning have been criticized for a deficit of the social context in the learning process (Baumgartner, 2001) and “with few guidelines as to how it actually plays out in the community” (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 255). However, Mezirow later acknowledged the role of social interaction and community (Baumgartner, 2012) with regard to reflective discourse in transformative learning, and stated, “It leads toward a clearer understanding by tapping collective experience to arrive at a tentative best judgment” (Mezirow, 2012, p. 78). He acknowledged and reviewed the role of the adult educator in social action (Baumgartner, 2012).

Communities of Practice

CoPs are commonly implemented in the areas of higher education groups, where educators can share their concerns, expertise, and knowledge with their colleagues. In many professional areas, CoPs are commonly designed to foster support and share a common concern among both individuals and groups (McDermott et al., 2002). For educators, CoPs serve as “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2011). Thinking together with the concept of CoPs is conceptually based on Polanyi’s (1962) idea of indwelling: when people’s indwelling is interlocked on the

same idea, they can guide each other through their understanding of a mutually recognized real-life situation and problems, and in this way, they indirectly ‘share’ tacit knowledge. Therefore, thinking together allows for developing and sustaining an invigorating social practice over time (Dorfler et al., 2016). Thus, thinking together is inclusive of interlocked indwelling, but interlocked indwelling is not necessarily inclusive of thinking together.

This, in turn, refines and elaborates Richard McDermott’s (2002) description of knowledge sharing as thinking together:

Sharing knowledge is an act of knowing who will use it and for what purpose. This often involves mutually discovering which insights from the past are relevant in the present. To share tacit knowledge is to think together. (p. 2)

The formulation of CoPs was founded within a postmodern framework that tends to be skeptical about the notion of knowledge, associating it with appointed experts who ‘monopolize’ the possession and creating of knowledge as their source of power. This explains why knowledge is silent in CoPs, being approximated with the concepts of learning, meaning, and identity (Dorfler et al., 2016). According to Wenger (2011), CoPs have three defining characteristics: Domain, Community, and Practice:

1. CoP members share a commitment to the domain and a collective understanding of each other's competencies and basic understanding of their shared concern or passion.
2. CoP members engage in joint activities wherein they learn how to improve their similar programs, share best practices, and discuss areas of growth. These joint activities are foundational for building the “community” in a Community of Practice.
3. CoP members are practitioners; they develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, a shared practice (p. 2)

Lave and Wenger, as well as other early contributions to the CoP concept (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Orr, 1996), paved the way for the current popularity of the studies of knowing-in-practice (Nicolini, 2011; Orlikowski, 2002; Rennstam & Ashcraft, 2014), which was labeled as ‘the quiet revolution’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000). In the spirit of this approach, knowledge is the potentiality to act, while knowing is using what one knows in practice. Following this perspective, knowledge ‘sticks to the practice’ in the sense that the potential to act is developed in the social context, but it also ‘leaks through the practice’ when practitioners from different contexts learn from each other as they try to address similar real-life problems (Brown & Duguid, 2001, 2002).

Community of Practice in Higher Education During the Pandemic

The shift in educational settings due to the pandemic created a greater opportunity for CoPs in higher education. The opportunity allowed educators, teachers, and faculty to directly learn from each other and share information to inform colleagues on varied instructional practices, connecting with students through remote learning, etc. COVID-19 fostered changes in attitude

and internal roles in higher education, with some people more prone to react quickly and others that slightly reduced their participation. The voluntary nature of CoP and its flexible governance allowed the change agents community to adapt to the changes required by the crisis quickly (Biereman et al., 2020). Another notable impact of the CoP is that it allowed a huge number of faculty members to deal with issues related to teaching and learning safely and collaboratively. The educators felt the need to share and learn from each other (Biereman et al., 2020). Constructed around a CoP model (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wegner, 1998), the Digital Learning Exchange for Faculty and Staff using Microsoft Teams enabled teachers and instructors with remote teaching experience to support other educators through high relevant mentoring (Albl et al., 2011). As the novice online instructors and experienced instructors acquired new knowledge, they assisted others (Carter & Janes, 2020).

With the immediate push from the COVID-19 pandemic in academia, the activities and tools in higher education further evolved to online interaction, learning, and professional development through CoPs. For example, social media, particularly, Twitter and Facebook, is seen as an important tool for CoP for educators seeking professional development and learning. Following specific hashtags allows teachers to connect with other teachers sharing similar interests and challenges (Conley & Rasberry, 2020).

Collectively, the literature on CoPs in general, and especially of CoPs in higher education, assumes they operate in a “business as usual” context. Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic represents a very peculiar challenge. Indeed, in a case of crisis and during highly dynamic situations, faculty need to react fast to ensure the continuity of educational services (Burde et al., 2017). Therefore, it is important to examine if and how CoPs can operate effectively even in these extreme and unpredictable conditions. Indeed, there is little research on how CoPs can react during emergencies: examples include Amaratunga’s (2014) research that reported a pilot project of a virtual CoP to enhance disaster resilience in rural or remote areas or Curran et al.’s (2009) examination of the management of a health emergency. The empirical analysis of a CoP in higher education provides evidence of how emergencies can affect CoP functioning, suggesting the crisis might even enhance their abilities. The COVID-19 situation fostered changes in attitudes and internal roles, with some people more prone to react quickly and others that slightly reduced their participation (Li et al., 2020). Essentially, the voluntary nature of the CoP and its flexible governance allowed many of the educational organizations to adapt to the changes required by the crisis quickly. The crisis enabled a strengthening of the community (more activities realized, more plans for the future), and especially a sense of belonging (Li et al., 2020).

Adult learning among Communities of Practice. The increasing importance of CoPs was evident in the 2010 National Educational Technology Plan that argued online communities of practice should be an integral component of the future of professional learning for educators (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). In higher education, CoP benefits have included connecting people, providing shared context, enabling dialogue, stimulating learning, capturing and diffusing existing knowledge, introducing collaborative processes, helping people organize, and generating new knowledge (Cambridge et al., 2005). In a research study on adult peers in the

community for support and learning, Cherrstrom et al. (2018) found that participants built a community for support and learning, using programming as a foundation for building a CoP, with peer mentoring playing a significant role. One participant summarized their involvement in the CoP as vital. Another study participant reported the greatest CoP benefit was “the exchange of ideas and information with colleagues; each of us focuses on something different, so studying with the group opens up broader perspectives” (Cherrstrom et al., 2018).

In a CoP, all learners are seen as teachers and learners, regardless of their profession. As such, adult learners often experience uncertainty, isolation, and anxiety about academic and lifelong programs. Adult educators, including faculty and advisors, recommend the use of CoP to help meet the needs of all learners. For practice, the study provides implications for how programs can help adult peers build a community for support and learning. The CoP addressed learners’ basic concerns, such as moving through the program, through peer assistance in goal setting, and models of successful pathways (Cherrstrom et al., 2018).

Research in higher education literature suggests that CoPs can be effective in staff development by helping academics to share teaching experiences and innovations. One of the key proposed benefits of CoPs involves the opportunity for early-career practitioners to learn from more experienced colleagues (Wilson, Wilson, & Witthaus, 2020). Online CoPs are not merely websites, databases, or external resources, they are groups of people who come together in an online space to learn, interact, and build relationships, and through this process develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment (Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger’s (1999) conceptual explanations of communities of practice, though developed in studies of situated learning in workplaces, help to provide an understanding of the shared concerns and similarities of context that form effective online communities and explain their growing prevalence in workplace practice and training (Schlager et al., 2002).

Communities of Practice in other industries. CoPs frequently form around the topics community members have invested many years in developing—topics they are often passionately interested in, including medicine, science, or manufacturing (McDermott, 2001). For example, in Shell Oil’s News Orleans operation, communities link people who work on different teams. CoPs have always been part of the informal structure of organizations. They form spontaneously as people seek help, try to solve problems, develop new ideas and approaches (McDermott, 2001). Communities form around technical disciplines and topics that draw people from many teams. Allied Signal supports learning communities by giving staff time to attend community meetings, funding community events, creating community bulletins, and developing a directory of employee skills. At American Management Systems (AMS), “leveraging” is the primary component of learning communities by education colleagues, writing, helping others, and teaching junior staff members has been central to the company since its inception (McDermott, 2001).

In medical education, the University of Central Florida uses a longitudinal clinical experience to promote deeper learning, professional identity formation, and adoption of the values of the profession. The first-year medical students are assigned to work with faculty preceptors

throughout the Central Florida medical community. While CoPs do not have to be informal, they are fundamentally self-governed, and they are driven by peoples' regular thinking together. The scope of CoPs, therefore, includes those people who engage in thinking together regularly, and those individuals who have meaningful access to that thinking together. Access to the CoP entails at least an elementary understanding of what is talked about and the ability to contribute to the shared practice (as in legitimate peripheral participation). Thus, a social space deserves to be called a CoP if it can be characterized by sustained thinking together that is enriched by less intensive forms of participation.

Conclusion

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic ushered major disruptions in the educational systems forcing HEIs to transition from face-to-face instruction to emergency remote teaching. In the context of the transformative learning theory, the current global health crisis serves as the "disorienting dilemma" that offers a unique prospect to rethink innovative pedagogies. As Berry et al. (Berry et al., 2020) pointed out educators, researchers, and administrators are moving from triage to transformation. In addition to new instructional modalities, there is also a growing awareness for more coherent educational systems that provide collaborative approaches and support networks such as communities of practice. The development of these communities of practice can offer professional expertise and emotional support to educators and pracademics. As succinctly said, "Learning is a social process of construing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to action" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222). Recognized as the "founder" of the term and concept community of practice, Wenger (1998) highlighted that a CoP includes three components: domain of knowledge, shared practice, and a community of people. This paper focused on two of these elements of CoPs, 'community of people' and 'shared practice.' In the higher education sector, this process of connecting to form a CoP is a way to connect faculty and staff and their educational institutions beyond their departments and campus. The creation of CoPs at institutions have connected faculty and staff in sharing their academic concerns, expertise, and knowledge with their colleagues and peers (McDermott et al., 2002). As some researchers suggest, the COVID-19 pandemic caused a greater need for CoPs in educational settings to assist faculty in sharing knowledge and ideas on instructional methodologies and practices of online learning. During this pandemic, the concept of shared practice has allowed staff and faculty to collaborate and share ideas to help work toward resolving institutional challenges during a crisis, professional development, and mentoring. The ideas of CoPs help to enhance the knowledge base of adult education and the development of adult learning theory (Hansman, 2008). CoPs have and continue to exist in other industries. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic fostered an opportunity for the higher education sector to demonstrate the importance of transformational learning through the establishment of CoPs.

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Using Children’s Literature to Create a Culturally Responsive Teaching Environment in a Pre-Service Teacher Course

William Blackwell, Ashley B. Crane, & Christina M. Gushanas

Abstract

The children’s literature available in K-12 classrooms often serves to perpetuate social inequalities and prejudices through the stereotypic portrayal or exclusion of characters from diverse backgrounds (Wanless & Crawford, 2016). Training pre-service teachers to select and use children’s literature that represents and values all aspects of our collective human experience is one strategy for addressing the marginalizing effects of inequality and prejudice in our K-12 classrooms. This paper describes a pilot study designed to help pre-service teachers learn how to select and incorporate diverse children’s literature into their teaching practice. Potential implications for teacher preparation programs and next steps for this project will be discussed.

Key Words: culturally responsive teaching, children’s literature, teacher preparation

The children’s literature available in K-12 classrooms plays a powerful role in shaping the extent to which students from non-dominant backgrounds feel valued or devalued (Brinson, 2012). Classroom libraries that predominantly feature books focused on able-bodied children from white, middle-class families can serve to further marginalize students who do not fit into this demographic category. Additionally, these texts often perpetuate social inequalities and prejudices through the stereotypic portrayal or exclusion of characters from diverse backgrounds (Wanless & Crawford, 2016).

At the same time, children’s literature that reflects and values all aspects of our collective human experience can be empowering for students who represent our culturally diverse and increasingly global society. Children’s literature that addresses themes related to cultural diversity, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, religion, family structure, and socioeconomic status can provide an opportunity for students to value themselves and learn to support and value the other members of their community (Sharp & Johnson, 2016). Diverse children’s literature can also create learning moments for teachers and students to explore issues of discrimination and injustice, as well as to identify strategies for creating a more just, equitable society (Souto-Manning, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) and Teacher Preparation

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) provides a theoretical framework that can inform the work of university-based K-12 teacher preparation programs. Multiple studies have demonstrated the benefits of using a CRT framework to help pre-service teachers identify and use culturally

relevant children's literature in their emerging teaching practices (Brinson, 2012; Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009; Souto-Manning, 2009). In a CRT framework, the cultures and backgrounds of students become the center point for curricular and pedagogical decisions (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Teachers develop an understanding of the ways culture informs the behaviors and choices of individuals within relevant cultural groups. As teachers develop a deeper understanding of embedded cultural mechanisms, they in turn develop a socio-cultural awareness that allows them to identify inequities and prejudices that exist within their classrooms and communities. Once this awareness is developed, teachers are in a stronger position to address these inequities within the context of their classrooms and local communities (Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009).

Purpose and Research Questions

This paper describes a pilot study designed to help pre-service teachers learn how to select and incorporate diverse children's literature into their teaching practice. Through this study, we examined how pre-service teachers and their university faculty perceive the potential effectiveness of using culturally responsive literature kits in K-12 classrooms. We sought to answer the following: How do pre-service teachers and their university faculty perceive that culturally responsive literature kits: (a) help them to better understand issues related to race and ethnicity, disability, family structures, poverty, homelessness, mental health, and immigration and migration; and (b) help them incorporate teaching practices and classroom curriculum related to these issues?

Context for the Study

This pilot study was conducted at Sam Houston State University (SHSU) in Huntsville, TX. SHSU enrolls approximately 1,300 students per semester in undergraduate teacher preparation programs. Over 60% of these students are first-generation degree-seeking students and many are adults returning to complete a higher education degree after several years in the workforce (SHSU, 2020). This study focused on students in the elementary education program, which includes students seeking endorsements in special education and/or bilingual education in addition to their elementary teaching certificate.

Students in this program complete four consecutive semesters of courses that include field experience hours in K-12 schools. This study focused on the first of these semesters in which students enroll in a course titled *Creating Environments for Learning in Elementary Schools*. This course is explicitly designed to help pre-service teachers learn how to build classroom learning environments that value and support the diversity of their student communities. Since the course is also positioned at the front end of their field experience semesters, it seemed an ideal class to begin the ongoing work of becoming a culturally responsive teacher (Banks, 2001; Howrey & Whelan-Kim, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Literature Kits

This project was designed to help pre-service teachers learn how to select and incorporate diverse children's literature into their teaching practice. To accomplish this goal, the authors

applied for, and received, a competitive internal grant to fund the purchase of culturally responsive children’s literature. The books were assembled into literature kits that contained a selection of titles that explored themes related to race and ethnicity, disability, family structures, poverty, homelessness, mental health, and immigration and migration. University faculty and pre-service teachers used dedicated class time to explore and critically examine the culturally responsive literature kits to better understand issues related to cultural diversity and to learn strategies for using these texts in K-12 classrooms.

Twenty-eight children's literature titles were selected. Reflective of established recommendations for supporting CRT (Sharp & Johnson, 2016) and to ensure relevance and applicability to the elementary environment, selected titles were award and/or honor winning fiction and nonfiction titles, with interest and reading levels appropriate to children in grades K-3, that presented diverse perspectives and authorship. Additionally, the selected titles needed to be available in print and published since 2000, except where a newer title of exceptional quality was not available. Ideally, the titles had educator or parent resources available within SHSU’s library collection or databases or freely available online. Limiting selected titles to those published within the last two decades modeled the recency of titles found in current classroom libraries (Kerby, 2019), exposing pre-service teachers to the kinds of children’s literature they will likely have access to. Similarly, titles with existing educator or parent resources provided a curricular foundation upon which pre-service teachers can build their pedagogical design capabilities (Brown, 2009).

The 28 titles were divided into two mini-collections, equally distributing books within each theme, and paired with a professional educator title. Fisher, Frey, and Savitz’s *Teaching Hope and Resilience for Students Experiencing Trauma* (2019) was chosen as the professional title to inform instruction as it regards the effects of classroom environment and literacy in addressing the needs of students experiencing trauma. The two mini-collections were replicated to create eight culturally responsible literature kits, enabling every course section to engage with a kit. Kits were placed in plastic bins and housed in SHSU’s Newton Gresham Library to ensure ease of transport and continued maintenance. The selected titles are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Titles Included in the Culturally Responsive Children’s Literature Kits

Race & Ethnicity

- Barnes, D. D. (2017). *Crown: An ode to the fresh cut*. Bolden, an Agate imprint.
- Brown, M. (2011). *Marisol McDonald doesn’t match*. Children’s Book Press.
- Kostecki-Shaw, J. S. (2011). *Same, same, but different*. Henry Holt.
- Penfold, A., & Kaufman, S. (2018). *All are welcome*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Table 1

Titles Included in the Culturally Responsive Children's Literature Kits

Disability

- Abdullah, S., & Abdullah, A. (2014). *My friend Suhana*. Loving Healing Press.
Alexander, C. (2012). *Back to front and upside down!* Eerdmans Books for Young Readers.
Bertrand, D. G. (2010). *My pal, Victor*. Raven Tree Press
Hoopmann, K. (2006). *All cats have Asperger Syndrome*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
-

Family Structures

- Oelschlager, V. (2010). *A tale of two daddies*. Vanita Books.
O'Leary, S., & Qin, L. (2016). *A family is a family is a family*. Groundwood Books.
Walsh, M. (2012). *Living with Mom and living with Dad*. Candlewick.
Woodson, J. (2002). *Visiting day*. Scholastic Press.
-

Poverty

- Boelts, M. (2009). *Those shoes*. Candlewick Press.
Brandt, L. (2014). *Maddi's fridge*. Flashlight Press.
Roberts, J., & Casap, J. (2018). *On our street: Our first talk about poverty*. Orca Book Publishers.
Williams, V. B. (1982). *A chair for my mother*. Greenwillow Books.
-

Homelessness

- Bunting, E. (1991). *Fly away home*. Clarion Books.
Gunning, M., & Pedlar, E. (2014). *A shelter in our car*. Children's Book Press.
Reeves Sturgis, B. (2017). *Still a family*. Albert Whitman & Company.
Upjohn, R. (2007). *Lily and the Paper Man*. Second Story Press.
-

Mental Health

- Henkes, K. (2000). *Wemberly worried*. Greenwillow Books.
Holmes, M. M., Mudlaff, S. J., & Pillo, C. (2000). *A terrible thing happened*.
Magination Press.
Jones, L. (2015). *The princess and the fog: a story for children with depression*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
Oliveros, J. (2018). *The remember balloons*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.
-

Immigration and Migration

- Buitrago, J. (2015). *Two white rabbits*. Groundwood Books / House of Anansi Press.
Bunting, E. (2006). *One green apple*. Clarion Books.
Danticat, E., & Staub, L. (2015). *Mama's nightingale: A story of immigration and separation*. Dial Books for Young Readers
Kobald, I., & Blackwood, F. (2014). *My two blankets*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
-

Methodology

Participants

Participants for this study were SHSU pre-service teachers in the elementary education program enrolled in a course titled *Creating Environments for Learning in Elementary Schools* and the university faculty teaching the course. This course is explicitly designed to help pre-service teachers learn how to build classroom learning environments that value and support the diversity of their student communities. The course is positioned in the first of four consecutive semesters of field experience hours in K-12 schools. Students and faculty from four course sections participated in the study. In total, 42 pre-service teachers and four university faculty participated in the study.

Data Collection

University faculty and pre-service teachers used dedicated class time to explore and critically examine the culturally responsive literature kits in order to better understand issues related to cultural diversity and to learn strategies for using these texts in K-12 classrooms. To assess how pre-service teachers and their university faculty perceive the effectiveness of using culturally responsive literature kits, we developed two surveys: one survey for pre-service teachers and one survey for their university faculty. Both surveys contained 16 items with a combination of single line, multiple-choice, and 5-point Likert Scale responses. The surveys were administered electronically through the Qualtrics software program using procedures approved by the SHSU Institutional Review Board. Data were collected during the fall 2020 and spring 2021 semesters.

Procedures

University faculty received the culturally responsive literature kits from SHSU's Newton Gresham Library. An implementation checklist was provided to the faculty that provided suggestions for how to structure class time and assignments to help pre-service teachers explore and critically examine the culturally responsive literature kits. Following the class sessions that focused on the kits, the pre-service teachers and university faculty completed their respective surveys designed to gauge their perceptions of how the kits influenced their understanding of issues related to cultural diversity and their future use of these types of materials in K-12 classrooms. Data were analyzed and summarized in response to the research questions.

Results

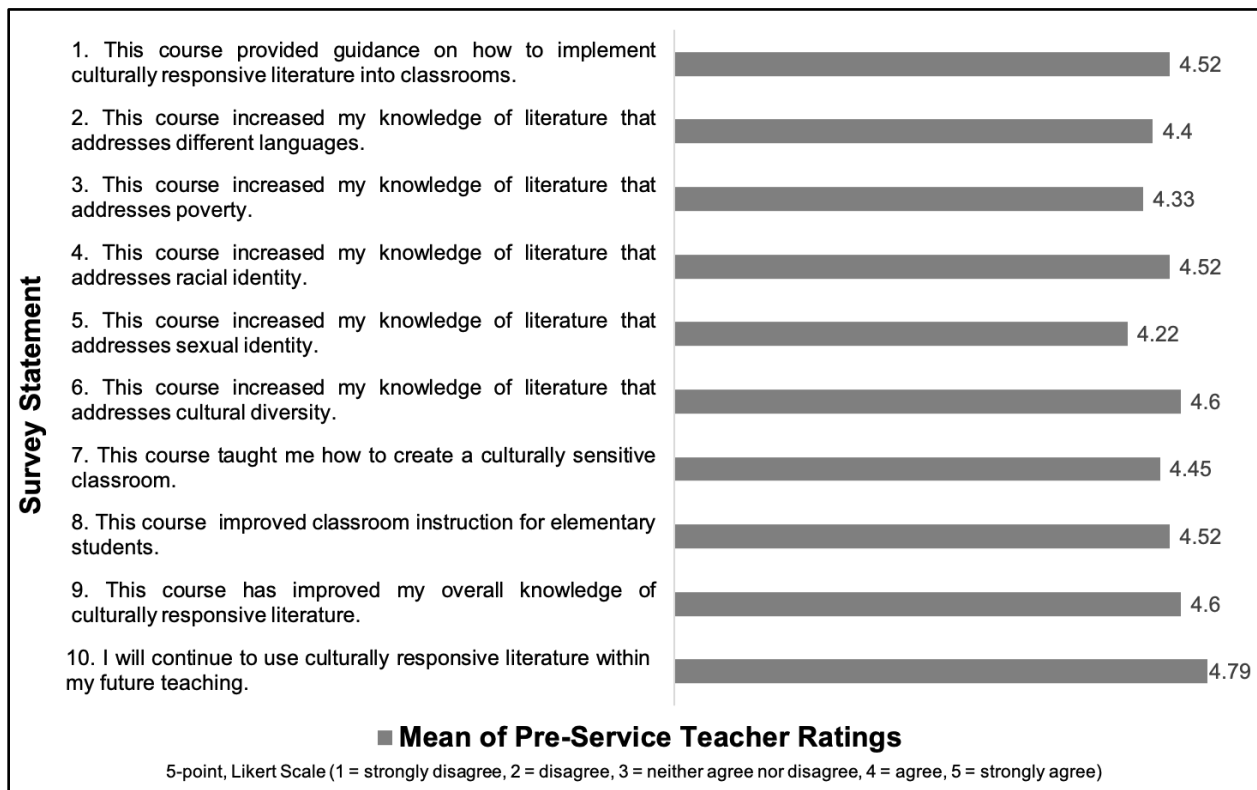
We used descriptive statistics to summarize the demographics and perceptions of the culturally responsive literature kits. A total of 46 individuals participated, comprised of 42 pre-service teachers and four university faculty.

Pre-Service Teachers

The 42 pre-service teacher respondents reported themselves as senior-level elementary education majors (83%) or junior level elementary education majors (17%). Most pre-service teacher respondents (98%) reported gender of female (95%) or male (2%). There was a single non-response to gender. Regarding race/ethnicity, the pre-service teacher respondents reported themselves as Black or African American (14%), Hispanic or Latino (41%), or White, (45%).

Figure 1

Pre-Service Teacher Perspectives of Culturally Responsive Literature Kits



The respondents rated 10 statements on a 5-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Figure 1). The statements were related to their understanding of issues related to cultural diversity and their potential implementation of culturally responsive literature in K-12 classrooms. Statements 2-6 and 9 addressed pre-service teacher perceptions of culturally responsive literature kits related to understanding issues related to cultural diversity. The mean pre-service teacher ratings for statements 2-6 and 9 ranged between *agree* and *strongly agree*, with the highest agreement in the areas of increased knowledge of literature that addresses cultural diversity and improved overall knowledge of culturally responsive literature. Statements 1, 7, and 10 addressed the incorporation of teaching practices and classroom curriculum related to cultural diversity. The mean pre-service teacher ratings for statements 1, 7, and 10 ranged between *agree* and *strongly agree*. The highest average agreement was with “I will continue to

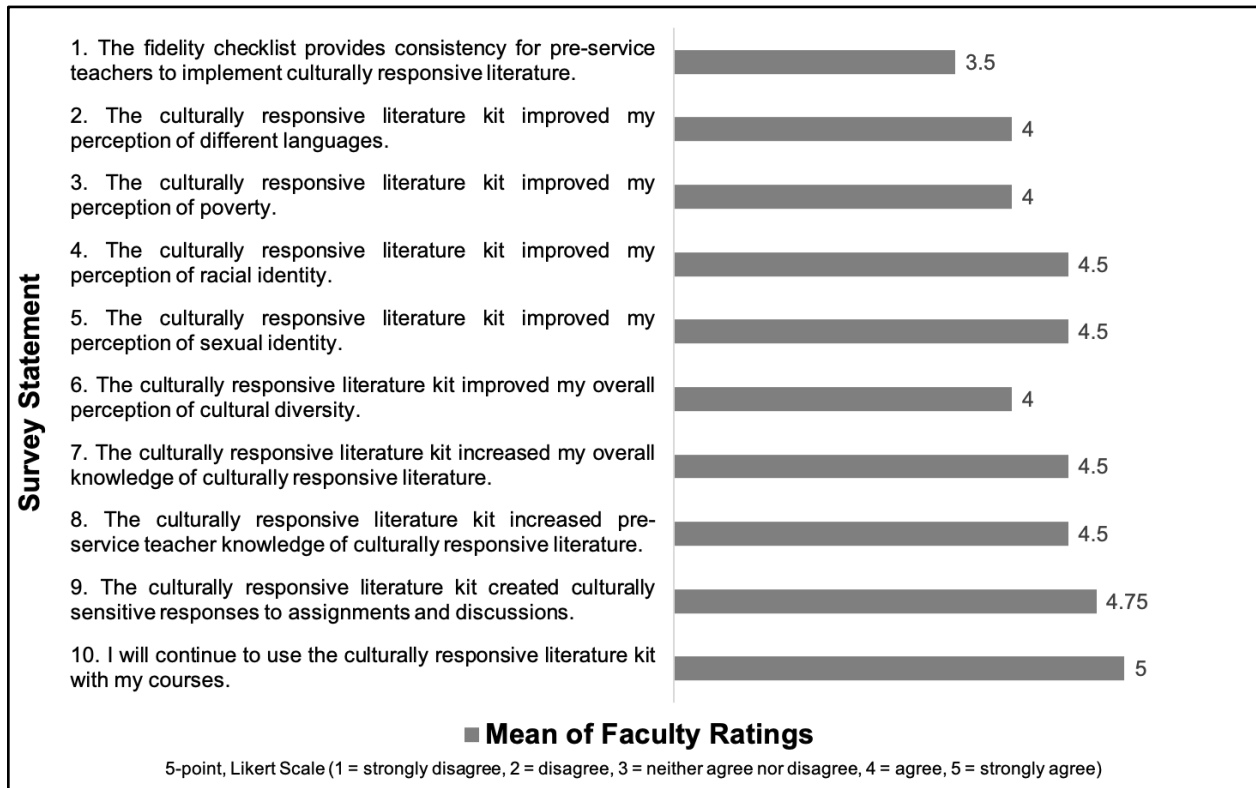
use culturally responsive literature within my future teaching” (statement 10). A single rating of *disagree* was reported for statement 5 and statement 9, and none of the statements were rated *strongly disagree*.

University Faculty

The four university faculty respondents reported themselves as clinical faculty (50%), tenure-track faculty (25%), and tenured faculty (25%). Furthermore, 50% reported 1-9 years of experience in higher education, 25% reported 10-19 years of experience, and 25% reported 20 years or more of experience. All (100%) of the respondents reported themselves as White and female. Faculty respondents rated 10 statements on a 5-point Likert scale of *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Faculty Perspectives of Culturally Responsive Literature Kits



The statements were related to their use of the culturally responsive literature kits, their perception of issues related to cultural diversity, and their willingness to use the kits with future courses. Statements 2-8 addressed faculty perceptions of culturally responsive literature kits related to understanding issues related to cultural diversity. The mean faculty ratings for statements 2-8 ranged between *agree* and *strongly agree*, with faculty averaging the highest agreement with culturally responsive literature kits improved their perception of racial identity

(statement 4), sexual identity (statement 5), overall knowledge of culturally responsive literature (statement 7), and improved pre-service teacher knowledge of culturally responsive literature (statement 8). Statements 1, 9, and 10 addressed the incorporation of teaching practices and classroom curriculum related to cultural diversity. The mean faculty ratings for statements 1, 9, and 10 ranged between *neither agree nor disagree*, *agree*, and *strongly agree*. Most notably, all faculty respondents (100%) indicated they *strongly agree* with the statement “I will continue to use the culturally responsive literature kit within my courses” (statement 10). Finally, none of the statements were rated as *disagree* or *strongly disagree* by faculty respondents.

Implications and Next Steps

The findings from this pilot study are promising. Both pre-service teachers and university faculty reported that the use of culturally responsive literature kits in the *Creating Environments for Learning in Elementary Schools* course helped them better understand issues related to race and ethnicity, disability, family structures, poverty, homelessness, mental health, and immigration and migration. Additionally, the participants reported being more comfortable and likely to incorporate teaching practices and classroom curriculum related to these issues. These are important steps in helping our next generation of teachers build classrooms that provide an opportunity for students to value themselves and learn to support and value the other members of their community (Sharp & Johnson, 2016).

There are a few next steps for the project. First, we are using funds to assemble culturally responsive literature kits in e-book format. With more schools going to virtual learning resources, this seems like an appropriate next step. We plan to continue administering the surveys to participating classes to examine if there are any differences with encountering these texts via e-book format or hardcopy texts. We are also exploring the possibility of building literature kits that focus more specifically on a specific aspect of cultural diversity. This would allow us to expand the project into other courses within our teacher education program that align specifically with specific aspects of cultural diversity. For example, we could use literature kits focused on disability themes in our introductory special education course or kits focused on family structures in our parent partnerships class. As we take these steps, we are optimistic that our university can prepare culturally responsive teachers who build classroom environments supportive of all children.

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The Year the Planet Experienced a Transformative Learning Experience

Patricia G. Coberly-Holt & Megan Small

Abstract

Adults acquire frames of reference throughout their lifelong experiences, culminated from associations, values, feelings, concepts, and conditioned responses, and they are the structures that define one's worldview (Mezirow, 1997). Many things in a person's life can affect the way they view the world around them, most notably perception and culture. One's culture greatly affects the norms, mores, and beliefs they choose to adopt and believe to be "normal," and their perception is what affects their interpretations of the world around them. There are times when an event occurs that turns one's world upside down and a new 'normal' must be visioned and accepted.

In early 2020 an event so extreme and novel came along that everyone in the world was affected and took the globe unaware. This huge event, the COVID-19 pandemic, came without warning to most of the world's population and created circumstances that were ripe to inspire transformational learning. While this did occur for some, many were left attempting to grasp the meaning of this event a full year after it appeared.

This paper explores how transformational learning occurs, including necessary adequate conditions and steps involved and an explanation of why many adults are still grasping the idea of a global pandemic and what needs to happen to eradicate the virus. How individuals traditionally respond to healthcare advice and the current state of contradictory information around political advice will also be discussed as possible motivating deterrents to mass confusion.

Key Words: COVID-19, pandemic, transformational learning, health education

When the global COVID-19 pandemic hit in early spring 2020, no one was prepared for what was to come. Overnight the world experienced a deadly global threat, and no one knew exactly what it was or how we could remain safe. There was an opportunity in place for the world to come together and experience a transformational learning experience as one. But the world was slow to comprehend what was happening, what needed to occur, and the citizens of the world did not experience global transformational learning. Although everyone was experiencing the same disorienting event, reactions varied between continents, countries, within families even households.

According to transformational learning theory, learners tend to shift their worldview as they obtain new information that is counter to their past ideas and understanding through critical reflection. While correct, it does not explain the whole story of the conditions necessary for

transformational learning to be effective or what went wrong in how individuals learned of the devastating year.

As the country becomes more diverse, healthcare professionals are lagging when it comes to culturally competent providers and systems. Culturally competent health care includes the ability to provide care to all patients, including those with diverse values, belief, behaviors, and meeting patients' social, cultural, and linguistic needs by "acknowledging the importance of culture, incorporate the assessment of cross-cultural relations, recognize the potential impact of cultural differences, expand cultural knowledge, and adapt services to meet culturally unique needs" (American Hospital Association, n.d.).

During this time, Americans experienced a lack of trust for government leaders and the legitimacy of healthcare leaders due to an uptick in contradictory and inaccurate messages touted by politicians, traditional media outlets, and social media platforms. It came to the point that most individuals were unsure of what to believe or do to avoid infection during the pandemic.

Transformational Learning

Transformational learning, first introduced by Mezirow in the late 1970s, is a theory that involves a drastic, fundamental change in how one sees themselves and their world. Unlike the type of learning that adds to one's current knowledge, transformational learning changes who we are as individuals. Going beyond simply acquiring new information, transformational learning dives into the way learners find meaning and understanding in their lives. An experience of this type leads to a fundamental change in one's perceptions with the start of learners questioning everything they knew or thought about the event before this and examining the situation from new perspectives to understand new insights and information. Mezirow posited that adult learning often involves taking what one believed and thought at a younger age, and through critical reflection understand reality in a mature way through the impact of transformation (WGU, 2020).

Mezirow (1996) defined transformational learning as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (p. 162). Life experience is the key concept. Based upon one's nature, human beings possess a desire to understand their personal experiences and to make sense of what is going on around them. When one realizes that their prior beliefs are not working, they have two choices. They can either deny or postpone dealing with the issue, or they can confront their prior belief (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). By engaging with this personal contradiction to make meaning comes the opportunity to revise one's perspective. This involves the learner critically examining their assumption and beliefs through self-exploration to determine how they have come to the conclusions they hold that have been structured from past experiences.

Transformative learning is similar to experiential learning in that the learning is usually triggered by an experience or series of experiences (Boucoulas et al., 2010, p. 41); however, transformative learning often involves a worldview change, not just an expansion of knowledge.

When one's reality is shaken by a disorienting dilemma that contradicts one's typical worldview, it is possible to experience a perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). This occurs by reflection on one's current assumptions, recognizing the falsifications and replacing these with more accurate and inclusive perspectives. The resulting outcome is permanent personal change.

There are three phases involved in significant transformational learning following a disorienting dilemma that cannot be resolved by the learner through applying previous strategies. The first of these involves critical reflection of one's current assumptions, followed by discourse to validate the critically reflective insight, and finally, action on the part of the individual (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The new meanings and perspectives that come from this process are personal and variable. To test the new perspective, Mezirow (1995) stated that learners "seek the best judgment of the most informed, objective, and rational person that can be found and begin a special form of dialogue" (p. 53). This special form of dialogue is known as discourse, which "involves an effort to set aside bias, prejudice, and personal concerns and to do one's best to be open and objective in presenting and assessing reasons and reviewing the evidence and arguments for and against the problematic assertion to arrive at consensus (p. 53). When discourse is based on optimal circumstances, a learner has complete information that is free from deception, the ability to evaluate arguments objectively, and equal opportunity to participate in a variety of roles of discourse (p. 54).

Health Education

Health and wellness depend on individual motivation as well as support from interpersonal, community, and institutional sources (Hill & Ziegahn, 2010). Whether health education occurs at the individual, community, or population levels the intention is to bring about voluntary, informed behavior change, which is often resisted (Clark, 2002). Due to a variety of factors, including, but not limited to socioeconomic status, language, culture, and educational level, not everyone has equal access or even understanding of health care. According to Hill and Ziegahn (2010), while the highly educated will usually find their way to the knowledge needed to remain healthy, there are inequities among the larger societal level which can be based upon multiple factors, including economic, gender, citizenship, rural/urban, and ethnic/racial status.

One context for improving the health of citizens by changing personal behavior involves community health learning, which incorporates such settings as health fairs or other settings involving large groups of individuals. One of the highest hurdles in educating large numbers of people at once is that many adults are influenced by their readability and cultural sensitivity, with many finding the information inaccessible (Baker, 2006). Adults often do not have the sophisticated skills required for understanding the significance or practicality of the information they see on social media, television, or the Internet. Add to this an individual's level or lack of health literacy, defined by the Institute of Medicine (2004) as the extent to which individuals can process understand basic health information services needed to make appropriate health decisions, and the complexity of the issue is compounded. For many years cultural competence has been seen as a growing need of health care providers, as they are working with increasing patient diversity and differences in health beliefs and practices rooted in culture (Barbian, 2003).

COVID-19 Pandemic

On November 17, 2019, the first person took ill with what will later be identified as COVID-19 (Ma, 2020). The 55-year-old individual was from Hubei Province and had no connection to the wet market in Wuhan, China, where the virus was originally thought to have begun (Bryner, 2020). Bryner goes on to report that although it was not realized at that time, “that following the November 17 case, about one to five new cases were reported every day and by December 15, the total infections reached 27” with daily cases increasing after that. The case count reached 60 by December 20, the SCMP reported (2020).

Although the first case of COVID-19 occurred in November 2019 and physicians were alerted to a SARS-like illness in December of the same year, there were only whispers of what was going on in China, with little being reported to the rest of the world. Although the Center for Disease Control (CDC) implemented public health screenings at some of the larger U.S. airports in an attempt to prevent the virus from entering the country on January 17, the first case in the United States was confirmed four days later and information about the disease began to accelerate, even though the World Health Organization (WHO) was reluctant to categorize it a global health emergency. On January 30, the WHO finally declared a global health emergency, and the following day the Trump administration declared that Americans who had recently been to certain parts of China be quarantined. Following an announcement by the World Health Organization on March 11, that COVID-19 was being declared a pandemic, President Trump declared the novel coronavirus a national emergency two days later. On March 16, President Trump issued new, stricter national guidelines to stop the spread of the disease. Three days later California became the first state to issue a stay-at-home order which mandated that all residents stay at home except to travel to an essential job or shop for essential needs (AJMC, 2021).

During this time, more was being learned and reported about the novel coronavirus, not all of which remained consistent throughout the year. Initially, it was reported that COVID-19 could not be spread person-to-person, which was debunked by the end of January. At the end of March, it was reported that the virus could be transmitted through the eye, which contradicted earlier assumptions by leading professional societies (AJMC, 2021). It was not until July 9 that the WHO reported that the disease can be airborne, noting that that the virus may linger in the air of crowded indoor spaces and spread by asymptomatic individuals.

The plethora of information did not stop here. In the early days of the pandemic, the WHO, CDC, and most media outlets informed Americans that mask should not be worn since they did not protect people from COVID-19 and personal protective equipment supplies were needed for the health care workers working with Covid patients (Molteni & Rogers, 2020). It was not until April 3 that the CDC recommended the use of face masks for everyone over the age of two (Hauck et al., 2020).

On September 21, the CDC reported on the higher risk for those who ate at restaurants, whether seated at a patio, outdoors, or indoors (AJMC, 2021). According to AJMC (2021) on September

18, the CDC posted on their website guidance stating that transmission of the virus was airborne and pulled the guidance three days later saying that it was posted in error.

Media Response

With little knowledge of what was happening or why decisions were made, a plethora of contradictory messages flooded Americans through media outlets. What many citizens did not realize is that when the Fairness Doctrine was eliminated in 1987, station owners were provided the freedom to air talk shows of their choosing. Before this time, media outlets were required by their broadcast licenses to treat opposing sides fairly, which meant that if a station owner aired a conservative or liberal talk show in prime time, they also had to air one of the opposite types in prime time. More broadcasters began new “talk” news shows that leaned in one direction, which is when the media began inundating viewers with one-sided misinformation (Patterson, 2021). Yochai Benkler et al. (2018) concluded in a study of more than 4 million messages, that partisan media are distinctive for their disinformation, lies, and half-truths.

Add to this the onslaught of sensational messages shared continuously on the Internet and social media, it is hard to determine which statements are true and which comments are untrue. Bridgeman et al. (2020) found a high level of misinformation relative to news media with a higher level of misinformation circulating on Twitter as compared to traditional media. To determine how quickly true and false news stories were dispersed through social media, 126,000 news stories distributed on Twitter from 2006 to 2017 were reviewed, and researchers determined that in all categories of information that false stories were shared faster and significantly farther and more broadly than true stories in all categories of information (Vosoughi et al., 2018). In 2017 false news stories were 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories and it took true stories almost six times as long to reach the same number of people as it did false stories (Dizikes, 2018). “Highly polarized political environments and media ecosystems can lead to the spread of misinformation, such as in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic” (Allcott et al., 2020; Motta et al., 2020).

A 2020 Pew Research Report noted that there is little public trust in the federal government, with only 20% of U.S. adults reporting that they trust the government in Washington to “do the right thing” just about always or most of the time, and only 42% of Americans responded that the federal government was effectively handling threats to public health. At this time, the world was in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, with 70% of Republicans and 17% of Democrats responding that they believed the federal government was doing a very or somewhat good job of effectively handling threats to public health.

At the beginning of the pandemic, most Americans approved of their state and local officials’ responses to the virus, but by summer 2020 the country was politically divided over how the federal government was reacting to the outbreak (Deane et al., 2021)

Summary

Dirkx (2006) insists that one's affect or emotions play a pivotal role in one's knowledge transformation by contemplation or allowing quite a time for imagery, imagination, and self-awareness. In addition, the learner's social environment and historical milieu play a significant impact in one's personal experience (Clark & Wilson, 1991). While Freire believed social action was the goal of transformational learning, it was not enough to transform an individual (1970).

Individuals have frames of reference that guide their actions. When transformative learning occurs, one's frames of reference are disrupted, enabling one to see things differently and act differently (Mezirow, 2000). As reported by Taylor in a 2000 report, context and culture seem to be more important than originally thought. Personal contextual factors such as a "readiness for change" make people predisposed to a transformational learning experience (Novitasari et al., 2020).

"The goal of changing health behaviors is difficult to achieve, particularly because many patients often have misconceptions of health and medical treatment that are not adequately addressed by health professionals" (Greenberg, 2001). According to Young and Flower (2002), confusion may arise from unfamiliarity with medical terminology, communication styles and skills, and the context of the problem, as well as patients' obstacles in implementing doctor's recommendations.

The beginning of the first global pandemic since 1918 brought with it a sudden need for average people to locate and process large amounts of complicated and rapidly evolving information and terminology. "With perceived trustworthiness of information from both the White House and the media deeply divided along partisan lines, Americans expressed concerns about the proliferation of misinformation" (Deane et al., 2021). Although deception at the highest levels of government is not new, the norm against lying by political leaders has weakened, with lying now endemic at the highest levels of politics in the United States. (Patterson, 2021).

Amid all the confusion surrounding the necessary conditions that lead to a transformational learning experience, many found themselves lost. Although the world had a perfect opportunity to share in a transitional learning experience, the conditions were not in place for success.

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Narrative and Valuing the Specific and Contextual in Experiential Learning

Abigail Dallmann

Abstract

Narrative writing as a method of prior learning development provides a powerful format for transformational learning, as students are given the opportunity to articulate and frame their learning and academic journeys. In the University Without Walls program, we use a narrative portfolio as a method to present prior experiential learning. The portfolio includes an introduction and conclusion so students can situate their learning within the context of their life journey, and analytical chapters that offer a more open-ended space for storytelling and exploration of specific moments and contexts.

Key Words: narrative, prior learning portfolio, storytelling, transformational learning, contextual knowledge, adult learners

The University Without Walls is celebrating 50 years of existence at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. It began as an experimental program in 1971 and one of its central experimental ideas was to honor the knowledge that exists outside the academy. The language “without walls” was used to capture a variety of educational innovations, including opening up the campus to students up to 60 years and beyond, but the central concept was that students could learn from experts in the community and could learn from their own experience. This philosophy guides our approach to prior and experiential learning, as students are encouraged to articulate their learning in their own words. Students name the concepts they have learned from experience through a narrative process of portfolio development.

It is always so refreshing and invigorating to attend conferences with other adult educators as there are so many different and valid ways to approach prior learning articulation and assessment. At UWW we offer a variety of methods for prior learning, including transfer credits, credit for workplace training, and testing. But our central method of prior experiential learning assessment is through the development of an experiential learning portfolio. The students articulate the learning in their own words, specific to their contexts of learning.

The UWW portfolio consists of an introduction, 2-3 analytical essays, and a conclusion. The introduction and conclusion allow the writer to broadly position themselves at this moment—at the university, writing the essays, thinking about what is next, describing what was before. The introduction also allows the writer to set up the topics they will explore in the analytical essays. The conclusion offers a similar space for the student to articulate their position in their learning and their life journey. In contrast, the analytical essays are narrower in focus and usually consist of a series of learning moments loosely connected around a central topic, defined as an “area of learning.” Both portfolio components (the introduction/conclusion and the analytical essays) are based on narrative, but they each rely primarily on different forms of narrative. In Tom

Romano's book *Crafting an Authentic Voice*, he defines two types of narrative: narrative summary and narrative dramatization. Romano (2004) analyzes a piece of writing to explain these two types of narrative:

[The writer] skillfully uses narrative summary and narrative dramatization. Both strategies do important work, but there is a chasm in how they are rendered. Summarized narrative is effective in giving readers background information and context so that we set up a scene for dramatization...The dramatized narrative creates a movie in our minds. It's life we're seeing played out, not merely commentary about it ...We have, in a word, been storied. (p. 31)

The introduction and conclusion primarily use what I understand to be the work of narrative summary: the narrative offers background and context, and this larger, summarized narrative can establish a clear movement from one starting place or beginning to some other place or time. The chapters rely mainly on narrative dramatization: they capture more of a play-by-play of specific, confined moments, that loosely connect to other moments. The central importance of the narrative dramatization is in the details and the "thick description" of an experience, rather than the full story.

The difference in narrative types is significant. The narrative summary does the work that many in adult education have attributed to narrative generally: it offers a sense of coherence and establishes connections among the current person in the higher education environment, the past person the writer remembers and re-stories, and the future person the writer imagines. As Clark and Rossiter (2008) noted: "Every day we are bombarded by a dizzying variety of experiences and we make sense of those by storying them, by constructing narratives that make things cohere. Coherence creates a sense out of chaos by establishing connections between and among these experiences" (p. 62). I will return to the importance of the introduction and conclusion for offering a space to present this more managed or constructed story, but I want to turn to the analytical chapters and the opportunities within narrative dramatization.

The analytical essays rely on moments. This focus on particular moments without the concern immediately for how they fit together offers the possibility of storytelling within the writing process. Some researchers define narrative and storytelling as synonymous, but I am going to rely on the work of Tyler and Swartz (2012) to define these terms as distinct. Tyler and Swartz (2012) are interested in storytelling "between individuals, synchronously, face-to-face" (p. 455) and the possibility for transformative learning within this space. They describe storytelling as not a performance but "a relational, emergent, and nonlinear exchange that depends on both listening and post-story conversation" (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 455). The act of telling brings the story alive and offers space, right there, to change paths or rethink, whereas narrative is "crystallized" and hence narrative may suffer from "insistence on a particular message" (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 460). Stories can shift and change as they are delivered, both through the process of telling and through the interaction with listeners. This is the power that gives stories transformative potential: "The storytelling that has perhaps the most potency to foster transformative learning juxtaposes tidy, crystallized narratives with emergent, unplanned, and unfinished stories that merge with other stories" (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 456). In other words, the storyteller can

engage with an idea they may have already committed to a narrative, but the act of telling the story allows for new ideas and direction.

Part of the argument these researchers make around story telling is to define the process as similar to the term antenarrative (before narrative) established by David Boje: “Antenarratives come prior to the story being coherent, plotted, and practiced—in essence before it is crystallized into narrative” (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 460). Antenarratives can take many different formats, so they can be linear, like narrative, or cyclical, or rhizomatic. Cyclical antinarratives have no end but can be recurrent or connection to seasons and events. Rhizomatic antenarratives “extend but do not repeat, moving in unpredictable directions” (p. 460). Antenarratives “are told while the story is still unfolding, with the teller speculating on the direction in which the story is headed” (p. 460).

I find the arguments that Tyler and Swartz (2012) make compelling in terms of the open-ended storytelling action and its potential to offer space—space that provides an opportunity to reimagine the story and the ideas. This open-ended space of storytelling allows for risk-taking and its attendant vulnerability, and it invites complexity as the ideas do not need to be sorted out and hence simplified to make sense. If the story falls apart, perhaps by a question that moves the teller in a new direction, or the speaker losing the thread of the idea, this is an opportunity to examine and develop the complexity: “Key to this process is the ability of listeners and the teller to engage in post-telling conversations that explore the stories in ways that clarify, deepen, enlarge, expose new facets, and experiment with new meaning.” (Tyler & Swartz, 2012, p. 465). I teach in an asynchronous environment, so I cannot create the energy and actual life force of a story told in person, with others around that person. But I can create the open-ended and possibility-filled experience of trying out stories, and I can provide the post story engagement and the opportunity for expansion. This storytelling space can happen in writing and in an asynchronous environment if students are given the chance to experiment and write short moments without high stakes and with a lot of interaction and feedback among the other students and the instructor. I attempt to create this type of space through a series of 6 open-ended, very brief (2-3 paragraph), ungraded, practice pieces in my portfolio development course, and use these practice pieces to encourage students to play with narrative dramatization.

I value this work of practice, low stakes writing as a method of utilizing writing as a path of discovery, and in these practice pieces, I am hoping that students discover some moments that were important to them and worth exploring. I encourage students to start trying to put down some specific details of a moment, and in my experience, starting with specific details allows the student to then remember another detail, and another, giving them access to a moment that they thought they had forgotten or dimensions of an experience that they now can access. I am sure that many of us use low stakes personal writing to engage students—to find out what they are interested in thinking about, or what their experiences are in relation to some topic for the course. In the context of portfolio development, I am hoping students explore moments that were confusing or taught them something, moments that they want to return to, but they are not sure why. An earlier UWW practitioner describes this process in a similar way: “Students were asked to write about an incident they considered significant, even if at this point they couldn’t say what

the significance was” (Hall, 1990, p. 92). My overall goal is to explore areas for possible portfolio development as well as possible connections among stories that occurred in different contexts so might not initially seem connected but are linked to that goal is to allow students to use the writing as discovery pathway in an open-ended structure.

Emergent, organic, experimental storytelling is possible within the context of generative, non-graded, brief writing pieces that draw on narrative dramatization. The portfolio in UWW is developed within the context of a writing class, so the work overall is inherently recursive as part of the writing process—generating ideas, drafting, revisiting, expanding. In other words, the overall structure supports this practice of revisiting ideas, asking questions of ourselves, and allowing others to ask us questions, so these emergent practice pieces can be explored and developed. Although the demand to structure analytical essays looms ahead for the student, the final product of each analytical essay does not seek to have a clear overall beginning, middle and end. The essay structure does not demand rigid coherence, as each analytical essay is a collection or a compilation of stories. And although the writing does eventually need to cohere around an area of learning (or multiple areas of learning), these are defined by the student. The areas of learning can be articulated specific to the context of learning rather than an attempt to connect the learning to some abstract, universal knowledge.

My focus on the story-telling structure of the generative pieces and then the overall structure of the analytical essays is to draw attention to potential for the essays to be different from the type of rigid adult learning narrative that Elana Michelson (2012) described as overly prescribed: “[T]he life histories produced by adult learners in our classrooms are, in important sense, fictions (Michelson, 2011). That is, the narrative that students produce, however much they originate in real events, are multiply overdetermined by the structural and ideological frames within which they are encouraged to write” (p. 200). Michelson argues that the overall structure tends to force a certain “plot” that offers some variation on the theme of self-improvement or self-actualization: “The experience that ‘counts’ (quite literally in the case of the assessment of prior learning) is the experience that can be framed as leading to psychic or cognitive self-awareness” (Michelson, 2012, p. 205).

Michelson (2012) argued that as adult educators we need to allow students to explore ideas in a way that is more “contingent and historically determined” (p. 211). She explained:

We might...ask students to write about an experience that they thought they understood at the time but that then has seemed more complex and confusing as time has gone by. We might ask them to identify a moment of experiential learning that has not made life more intelligible, more authentic, or more empowered” but that instead left them perplexed. (p. 211)

Michelson’s call is important, and I believe that using narrative dramatization and focusing on specific moments rather than attempting a coherent arc of learning gives students a chance to wonder about moments within that space of story-telling openness and vulnerability. Furthermore, dramatic narrative allows for a context-specific exploration of experience and so

allows the complexity to remain even if the ideas do not neatly cohere. The writer can consider the specific, idiosyncratic, unique ideas from the moments they explore.

Another way of describing narrative dramatization within the analytical essays for portfolio development is to use the language of case study, and to consider the dramatized moments as cases that the student can explore. In case study, the goal is not to just find the universal, theoretical idea. The goal is to engage with the specific and contextual. Cases are used in the study of law, for example, to consider the “rules” or theories but also the relevant facts, and one does not exist without the other. In an article exploring the idea of case study and interdisciplinary knowledge, Wolfgang Krohn (2019) described the context-specific knowledge as “ideographic” and the more general, theoretical knowledge “nomothetic” (p. 42). Krohn (2019) argued that we need both forms of knowledge. He discusses the book *How the Laws of Physics Lie* by Nancy Carthwright and presented her point that Galileo’s law of falling bodies is modified by friction, wind force, raindrops. No combination of scientific computer simulation, using scientific formulas, could ever capture or predict what happens in one moment of an object falling.

Narrative dramatization in which the writer can explore a particular moment, in a particular context, at a particular time, offers a method for developing and expressing knowledge that is perhaps idiosyncratic and specific and contingent but no less valuable than the more theoretical, abstract forms of knowledge. Holst and Ku (2018) considered theories on experiential learning and reflection, and wonder about context-embedded learning:

What people learn from reflection should be related to the particular contexts that trigger the reflection. This perspective does not necessarily dismiss the concept of reflection. It is a critique of the assumed characteristics of universality and neutrality inherent in the knower. (p. 153)

Holst and Ku (2018) wondered about the implications of their questions in terms of education: “From a theoretical perspective, we should consider the question of what kind of difference it makes for a theory of learning when the learner shifts from the universal to the particular. How can we capture the context-embedded learner within a generalized theory?” (p. 154). In the UWW portfolio, the student can express their own context-embedded learning and engage in “conversation” with a generalized theory. For example, they may write about their observations and experience about a topic and then conduct some research on that topic to see where the overlap and disconnects lie to engage in conversation with the abstract ideas. This engagement does not seek to establish a hierarchy of knowledge but rather to value these different types of knowledge.

This process also perhaps begins to address another large question that Michelson (2012) raised, which is that adult learning narratives create two narrators, splitting the writing voice between the experiencing self and the reflecting self: “While the remembered self can have all kinds of failures of insight and meaning-making—indeed, the greater the failures, the greater the potential for forward movement—the remembering self must be epistemologically sure-footed and capable of cogent moral and intellectual clarity” (p. 207). The emergent narrative dramatizations,

in contrast, offer more flexibility: the writer can engage that moment and write from the context of that moment, and the writer does not have to make it “work” in some larger structure or larger narrative. Furthermore, valuing the specific, contextual knowledge from the experience releases the expectation that the knowledge reach that moral and intellectual clarity Michelson describes. It might be messy and specific.

There is also still value in the summary narrative or narrative that does operate to create coherence and order. Despite the useful criticism of the adult education narrative, this form and opportunity is also useful. These broader narratives enable the student to write themselves into the institution and change the story that they tell of themselves around higher education or learning. This opportunity to make sense of their overall journey is also a valuable step to connect their multiple selves as they move into and beyond their undergraduate journey. This type of narrative structure is possible for the UWW student within the introduction and conclusion components of the portfolio. Some students use this space to write the stories of their return to higher education, finally believing that they could be a college student, for example. Narrative overall offers space for this work of making sense of our journeys. As Clark (2010) argued: “Experience itself is prelinguistic; it exists prior to and apart from language. We access it, we reflect on it, make sense of it through languaging it, which is to say, through narrating. In short, we learn narratively” (p. 5). Whereas narrative dramatization offers a more open-ended, experimental space for learning, both forms of narrative are useful methods for developing prior experiential learning and for engaging in transformative learning.

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Transformative Learning: Joining and Leaving a Cult

MaKenzie Douglas & Jeremy Schwehm

Abstract

Much research has been conducted regarding the effects of previous cult membership or the reasons for cult membership (Almendros et al., 2009; Buxant & Saroglou, 2008; Coates, 2011; Robinson & Bradley, 1998). However, not much research has been completed that directly evaluates the relationship between previous cult membership/leaving a cult and the transformative learning process. The purpose of this review is to identify the role of transformative learning in cult membership. The transformative learning process may take place before cult membership (due to trauma or life transitions), during cult membership (due to control tactics), and after cult membership.

Key Words: cult membership, transformative learning process, cults

Before discussing the connection of cult membership to transformative learning, it is important to be aware of the differences in definitions surrounding the terminology. The goal of transformative learning is “[to effect] change in a frame of reference” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5) that allows individuals to understand why they tend to make certain decisions or hold certain beliefs. Because cults utilize many techniques under charismatic leadership to develop and maintain control, individuals develop a unique, sometimes referred to as “addictive” (Rousselet et al., 2017, p. 31), frame of reference that can be difficult or traumatic to defer from.

Cults Defined

The word cult can have a variety of different definitions depending on the area of interest. For example, in sociology, cults are defined as the “beginning stage of a new religion” (Boeri, 2002, p. 185). This definition is broad and alludes to separation from mainstream religion and the differences in belief systems and religious hierarchy. A definition by Singer is often widely used in cult research. In this definition, Singer discusses the typical hierarchical structure of cults. The definition expresses that members are often required to follow a leader who “claims to be led by a higher power” (as cited in Robbins & Bradley, 1998, p. 212). Members must also follow the rules specific to members and beliefs that have been outlined by the leader. This definition is much more concise and addresses the many different variations that may occur, but the definition does not address all common aspects of cult membership. A more comprehensive definition that has been developed based on a literature review, cults share similar characteristics in that they are high intensity groups that share a “belief system ... [and] behavioral norms” (Coates, 2011, p. 192) that are restrictive, controlling, and are often led by a charismatic leader (Matthews & Salazar, 2013, p. 188). To ensure continued membership and adoption of beliefs, leaders of cults

often persuade and maintain control over members by controlling information, behavior, and beliefs (Rousselet et al., 2017, p. 27).

Transformative Learning Prior to and While Joining a Cult Membership

An important piece of information that is crucial when discussing the transformative learning process in relation to cult membership is how an individual may decide or choose to join a cult. Transformative learning may take place before an individual decides to join a cult. As described by Robbins and Bradley (1998), cult membership is more common during times of transition: death of a family member, job loss, transition from high school to college, etc. A traumatic event may lead to a personal breakdown and may cause an individual to seek out a new source of personal fulfillment—causing the transformative learning process to begin. Cults may appeal to an individual's need to be supported and may seem to fill a void that was created by a recent trauma. Transformative learning may occur after joining the cult as well. As an individual shifts from their previous way of life to adopt a new belief/behavior system, a frame of reference shift is required for individuals.

Reasons for or Continuing Cult Membership

Individuals may join a cult due to family members or friend involvement. By having someone close to them, the individual will feel more comfortable and more willing to join. Similarly, individuals may be born into a cult. Being born into a cult may not require the transformative learning process to become or continue membership- rather, the transformative learning process would occur after cult membership.

Cults may also utilize control tactics to develop and maintain an addictive frame of reference. For example, charismatic cult leaders often utilize brainwashing, information control, and behavior control to ensure commitment. With these methods, leaders can cause cult members to develop and maintain a sense of dependence on the leader and cult. Dependence on the cult leader is constantly reinforced to maintain membership and trust. Each of these methods preys on the vulnerability of individuals who have recently suffered trauma and can cause individuals who were born into a cult to continue their membership.

Transformative Learning: Leaving a Cult

Because the goal of transformative learning is to affect frames of reference, it is important to discuss the frame of reference that is created by cult membership. Cult membership has been compared to an “addictive disorder” due to the long length of membership and the effects on every aspect of a former member's life (Rousselet et al., 2017, p. 31). This addictive quality is established through the cult's constant reinforcement of beliefs. After having to utilize tactics to secure and maintain membership, cult leaders cause members to feel as though they are dependent on the cult by creating an atmosphere of reliance.

Because of this, individuals who leave a cult may have a difficult transition back to life outside of the cult. Information that the individual may hear might contradict what they have been coerced to believe. Traumatic experiences can cause individuals who were previous cult members to suffer from mental health issues, such as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), anxiety, etc. that may cause the frame of reference shift to be more difficult after leaving a cult. However, the difficulty of adjusting to a new frame of reference depends on the individual's length of membership. For example, if an individual was born into a cult and accepted the cult's beliefs, the strength of their frame of reference may be much greater than that of someone who recently joined.

Cults Affecting Career/ Vocations

Cult membership may also affect an individual's career/vocation and their view of authority in the workplace. Strauser et al. (2006) found "a significant relationship between high levels of trauma symptoms and high levels of dysfunctional career thoughts along with lower levels of work personality, and vocational identity" (p. 353). While this quote does not explicitly state that cult members specifically carry over the effects of trauma to their occupation, it casts a wide net that alludes to the application of trauma in the workplace. For previous cult members, the trauma that has been endured may affect their views of authority figures in the workplace or their coworkers. Because of the different tactics charismatic leaders use to maintain control and because leaving the cult may result in a barrage of conflicting information, these individuals may not view their workplace authority figure as someone who they can trust, or they may struggle to understand their position in the workplace.

Conclusion

The transformative learning process may occur throughout cult membership due to the trauma that an individual may endure before, during, or after membership. The trauma endured before cult membership may result in an individual going through the transformative learning process and searching for belonging or identity. Individuals may also go through the transformative learning process throughout their membership due to a frame of reference shift. This shift is what causes individuals to also go through the transformative learning process again after leaving the cult. The length of membership will also cause the strength of the frame of reference to differ.

Individuals who have left a cult may have suffered trauma before, after, and during cult membership. To help individuals who may be transitioning from cult membership to life outside of a cult, examining the transformative learning process throughout cult membership allows for knowledge to be applied to counseling and higher education.

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Should College Educators Seek to Transform Their Students?

Alan Mandell & Xenia Coulter

By Way of Introduction

We created this session to take on any number of questions with which we, as adult educators, have been grappling for many years. That is, we wanted to use our session to think together about our role as educators and our assumptions about that role. And even more particularly, given the major theme of this year's conference, we wanted to return to the basics: to use this as an opportunity to critically think about our understanding of this tricky term, "transformation," to raise questions about it as an educational ideal and, in so doing, to take on some of the many issues that arise at the intersection of our faculty roles, the university's mission, and the goal of student transformation.

The Context

Transformation is, we know, a rather lofty ideal. Indeed, since Jack Mezirow's (1991) major publication, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, the topic has continued to animate a huge literature. Note in particular, Taylor and Cranton's (2012) 600-page compilation, *The Handbook of Transformative Learning*, and the now 17 years of the publication of *The Journal of Transformative Education*. Indeed, Mezirow's (1991) ideals (including being "free from coercion and self-deception," the "ability to be critically reflective," and "to be open to alternative perspectives," p. 198) have motivated many of us and encouraged us to think we can—and that we *should*—"transform" our adult students. And, too, such an ideal suggests that we might want to steer our *entire institutions* toward the goal of transformation.

Assuming we take the above context as a starting point, the following might be an ideal mission statement for the adult students in an institution of higher education in the United States today:

The mission of our college is to foster understanding and respect that will lead to an educated and enlightened citizenry. This institution will not just *transmit* the knowledge worth having but will *transform* students' ways of thinking and acting. That is the promise of transformation we make to our students, to our university community, and to society.

Inspirational as this statement appears, we believe that hidden beneath its words are certain questionable assumptions and expectations. Put in another way, as well-meaning as the intent of this mission, it may be less benign than it first appears, especially for progressive educators and devotees of John Dewey's (1916) thoughts on the role of education in sustaining our democratic society. As Biesta (2017) recently reminded us, truly progressive teachers invite their students to learn but leave open to them a space in which they trust the students will learn for and by themselves. As Dewey argued, a democratic society should encourage not a single outcome but

should recognize the value of multiple outcomes. Just as evolution depends upon the diversity of species, the vibrancy of a democratic society depends upon the diversity of its citizens and their ability to appreciate and make use of each other's differences, to successfully meet the unknown challenges of the future.

In our eagerness to shape and control the transformation of our students, could we be closing options for them that, due to our dispositions and assumptions, would not have occurred to us? In fact, more important, when we are guiding them in directions *we* deem crucial, could we be overlooking the abiding dangers of over-certainty? Moreover, what gives college teachers, experts in particular subject areas, and not necessarily experts in human nature, the right to define and expect specific internal changes and shifts in understanding that we deem valuable for our students?

Could it be that many of us are worried that without that aim of transformation—without that motivating spirit—schooling, and our work as educators, will get stuck in the most instrumentalist mode? Without it, will we lose any hope of an educational outcome that is not just the result of a pipeline spewing out finished students prepared for jobs and proper roles in society? That is, could it be that we worry that without transformation to pull us forward, we and our schools will become mere cogs in a system devoted to churning out graduates who fit into the status quo?

Our Conversation

After reading our proposed mission statement, approximately 10 faculty and graduate students joined our discussion. The consensus was that transformation did indeed refer to non-curricular forms of growth—new ways of thinking about oneself, about one's situation in life, or about the appropriateness of taking up goals set by our society or culture. But for many others, it also seemed to refer to the development of critical or creative thought. Considerable attention was also given to the presumption of inequality between teacher and student. In a transmission model, students pay money to receive the wisdom of their teachers. But just how wise are we in terms of analyzing our students' inner lives, or their notions of what society should be? One participant suggested that we may be thinking about two forms of developmental growth—horizontal versus vertical—which he attributed to writings by Kegan (e.g., 1994). We may be able to add (vertical) to our student's knowledge, but are we necessarily prepared to expand their thinking (horizontal) in all possible ways? Or, without training, are we not guilty of trying to transform their thinking only into ways that simply feel right to us?

In considering the discussions, three different questions about transformation in adult higher education stood out:

Of Definition

The question of defining our terms was center stage. That is, when we wonder about “transforming,” are we focused on adding some new knowledge or skills? Are these the dimensions in which transformation occurs? Could it be instead that, even from Mezirow's

perspective, transformation is really about the very possibility of seeing something we *already know* in an entirely new way – that the emancipatory goal of transformation offers us “freedom from libidinal, epistemic, institutional, and environmental forces that limit our options and our control over our lives” (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 97-98)? In this way, Mezirow’s notion of transformation is certainly about learning to think rationally or empirically, but it claims to go well beyond gaining new skills and competence in those areas. But we ask, in what ways does such transformation help us learn to be more tolerant of multiple ideas? Is such an expanded understanding of transformation—such a democratic ideal—included in our way of thinking about transformation? Should it be? If so, how is it taught and learned?

And we took up another knotty concern: As already noted above, at the heart of the transformation is a distinction between “transmission” and “transformation” and the critique of transmission (for Freire, “banking”). But how do we make that distinction if we as educators are “transmitting” the transformation goal that we are seeking? That is, the transformation seems to suggest that the learner is acquiring something not named in advance—perhaps something not even intended by another. If we claim “transformation” as an intended goal, haven’t we reduced it to another form of transmission? Might it be that, however unintended, this is another instrumentalist stance?

Of Morality

The question of the role of the educator and of the competence of that educator to take on the facilitation of transformation hovered around our discussion. We may believe that we can “help learners look critically at their beliefs and behaviors” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 197), but are we truly prepared to allow them to draw their own conclusions? Do we sufficiently trust that our students themselves can work their way through the steps of transformation, or, as Biesta (2017) pointed out in discussing emancipatory transformation (p. 73), are we unable to let go of our belief that they cannot get to the *right* place without our help? Is that what “expert guidance” looks like?

Of Measurement and Achievement

There was a third dimension of our reflections that focused on the question of measurement. How do we measure rational thought? How do we adequately evaluate any person’s success (or limitations) in viewing something in a new (a transformed) way? Can we ever make a claim to create change that we cannot even measure? Mezirow’s (1991) own description of this evaluative dimension raises many questions about the possibility—the adequacy—of our methods and judgments: “Evaluation of gains made as a result of transformative learning” he argues, “should attempt to map the learner’s initial meaning perspective and compare it with his or her later meaning perspective” (p. 226). And, even more specifically, he points out that such differences (a mode of “before” and “after”) can be seen by judging someone’s “ability to participate freely and fully in rational discourse, and willingness to accept consensual validation as a mode of problem solving in communicative learning” (p. 226). Can this be measured? How do we know what has been achieved? Are we prepared to *fail* to graduate a person who has not acquired new perspectives—become transformed—after four years of study?

By Way of Concluding

At the end of our session, one of the participants remarked, “Despite all these complexities, I have to say that when students come to me feeling they have nothing to offer and then leave having acquired confidence in their ability to think about and discuss new ideas, they *have* been transformed however it might be defined or measured.” All of us resonated positively with her observation. Still, knowing that transformation takes place is not enough in itself to fully understand the process, nor to fully understand our role in it, nor, finally, to make sense of its proper place in the university’s mission. This calls for more research and reflection.

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Learning Through Teaching: Self-transformation as a Result of COVID-19

Katy Miller & Christina C. Wray

Abstract

The transition to remote teaching at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic was felt on a technical, cultural, and personal level for individuals in the Student Learning and Engagement department at the University of Central Florida Libraries. Utilizing Mezirow's stages of transformative learning as a lens for understanding, this paper explores the personal learning journeys of the members of the department. Through exercises in reflection, an emotional rebalancing occurred, resulting in a transformational learning opportunity. This experience is presented as a means for others to adapt and assess current practices in a new educational landscape by providing guided reflection questions to help readers make meaning of their experiences.

Key Words: transformative learning, guided reflection, Covid-19, academic libraries

The Student Learning and Engagement (SLE) Department at the University of Central Florida (UCF) Libraries formed in 2006 because of the university's reaffirmation process with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. A Quality Enhancement Plan (University of Central Florida, n.d.) was created to develop students' information fluency, in part through the creation of online information literacy modules. Since that time, one of the few constants in the department has been these modules. The department itself underwent several years of changing focus, leadership, and faculty. Over time, librarians were asked to take on additional responsibilities to fill gaps in vacant positions from other departments within in the division. The temporary co-mingling became permanent, leading to a dilution of the department's initial goals. From the original department staff, only one librarian has remained within the department, working under four different leaders. Even the name of the department was fluid. Originally Information Literacy and Outreach, the department was renamed to Teaching and Engagement in 2016 to clarify the function of the department. In 2020, "Teaching" was replaced with "Student Learning" to align with the university focus on the student. Even prior to COVID-19, a storm of disorienting dilemmas was brewing.

With a new interim department head and sense of hope, the department conducted a visioning session in January 2020. The purpose of this session was to determine the goals and the identity of the department, as well as clarify roles for individuals. With the support of the Associate Director, duties outside of the department's mission were re-assigned.

In March of 2020, like most educational institutions across the country, UCF switched to a fully remote learning environment. COVID-19 had upended everything. This paper will explore how

the department utilized Mezirow's (2009) theory of transformative learning to better understand the emotional and cultural changes the department experienced and provide a guided reflection exercise to help others make meaning from the disorienting dilemmas the COVID-19 pandemic introduced to the higher education work environment.

Reflection Process

The negative impact the pandemic has had on higher education and the toll on educators has been widely documented (Garretson et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2020; Peacock, 2021). This rough road of challenges acted as a catalyst for the department. In a way, one could say this experience washed everything clean. Like a storm it was a bit rocky and unpleasant at first, but after the initial deluge SLE was able to see things in a fresh light. As part of the initial visioning session in January there was an attempt to outline previous goals and objectives. The department recognized that in the process of trying to define their role in the library, they were still working within the box of how things had been done before and had not been as open to all the things that could or should be. The reflection process took place in two stages, first during the visioning session, and then again during the summer of 2020 when it became clear that the global pandemic was negatively affecting the work of the department and the emotional wellbeing of the faculty in SLE.

Critical Assessment

Library instruction aims to build skills essential for academic success through teaching and engagement opportunities that lead to a better understanding of the research process. Predominately, these experiences take place outside of the formal curriculum or in decontextualized one-shot instruction sessions. There is pressure to create short, behavior - modification based instruction that can be shoe-horned into a single class. This can feel overwhelming when combined with the trend to oversimplify and commodify educational strategies, turning complex problems into band-aid solutions. The department's goal is to foster "I get it" moments that allow students to begin transitioning from outside observer to active participant in the scholarly community. This type of transformational learning is enhanced when the focus of instruction is shifted from behaviors to developing deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of scholarly communication and the motivations behind knowledge creation.

To successfully develop programming and cultivate faculty buy-in, the department needed to identify the internal and external barriers to success. There were numerous challenges to overcome, outlined in these reflection questions:

- The department is a collection of individuals who work well together, as opposed to a cohesive group. How can we build a sense of community with each other?
- The mission of the department is not well-understood within UCF Libraries. How can we communicate our services to library colleagues and build synergy with other departments?

- Library services are traditionally viewed as supplemental to teaching faculty. How can we better convey what knowledge gaps we can address?
- The large size of the university and the small size of the department translate to a large librarian to student ratio. Student Learning and Engagement is composed of three faculty librarians serving approximately six thousand students in our target areas. How can we best reach students and provide learning opportunities, both formally and informally?

Assessment in a New Landscape

The closure of the university forced the department to adapt to the completely different mindsets of students and faculty regarding library services. In times of crisis, library instruction and information literacy focused lessons are generally one of the first things removed from the curriculum. These sessions are often viewed as reinforcement of skills that research shows faculty assume students should already know or will acquire incrementally across their academic career. While faculty acknowledge the importance of these skills, they may not explicitly teach them (Baird, 2020). This creates additional challenges for students who have not had the opportunity to fully develop their scholarly communication skills.

Often assessment is viewed through the lens of collecting statistics, and many times, the numbers show a snapshot of what happening without any insight on the why. It was clear that the number of services requested was declining and the department could have easily stopped at a single word explanation: COVID. Instead, they chose to critically assess the more complex issues surrounding these changes.

Through self-reflection, SLE was able to recognize that while faculty and students appreciated the resources provided, they are not seen as essential. The department also recognized the need to be more explicit in communicating the value of these skills in moments of crisis. Further, content needs to be covered and delivered in a new way. It was essential to develop an approach that better fit the reality of what instructors were realistically able to include in the course.

To begin solving this problem, the department had to accept the emotional and technical realities that had morphed from the expectation of managing a brief crisis to an everyday existence. The following realizations helped the department transform their expectations and interpretations of their current experience:

- On an emotional level, accept things as they are, not how it is perceived they should be.
- Recognize that the department's best efforts are okay.
- Be comfortable with failure. It is a critical skill to successfully adapt to this new environment.
- Be comfortable with things not being perfect and showing vulnerability. It can make the experience more authentic and foster a closer connection with students.
- Recognize a lot of experimentation needs to take place.
- Recognized the importance of adjusting scale.
- Recognize when to acknowledge failure.

After accepting the emotional and technical realities, there was nothing stopping SLE from trying new things.

Self-Reflection Exercise

Those interested in conducting a self-reflection can use the following questions as a framework.

- What is the issue or problem? Consider contributing factors and solicit multiple perspectives to obtain a broad understanding, particularly if the issue is complex.
- Rate your own skills and abilities to solve this problem. It is essential to undertake an honest evaluation to gain insight on the tools at your disposal.
- What is the cultural climate at your institution?
- What is your mindset?
- What do you need to feel stable?
- What are your options? Have you truly explored all options? Can you let go of your assumption or confirm the assumption is true?
- What is a realistic course of action? Small actions can be impactful.
- What is the real outcome if it all goes wrong? Are you worried too much about failure?
- Are you acting with intention or automatically?
- Can you define success as the process instead of the outcome?

Conclusion

Librarians at the UCF Libraries' Department of Student Learning and Engagement used the challenges presented by a new educational environment to conduct a self-reflection that transformed how they viewed their work and taught students. This process culminated in a means to identify existing challenges and any contributing factors that were negatively impacting the department's ability to foster a successful and healthy work environment. Included in the reflection was consideration of technical, cultural, and personal realities. This led to an examination of current practices and caused the department to re-think how they approach their work. This change was more than adopting new tools, but led to a cultural change within the department:

- First and foremost, support each other.
- Focus on outcomes for student learning and to measure the department's performance.
- Recognize solving complex issues is an iterative process requiring experimentation and adjustment.

The lasting changes as a result of COVID-19 on higher education have yet to be fully realized. As the profession moves forward, this reflective process can be a valuable tool to ensure successful adaptations to work and emotional wellbeing for faculty and staff.

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Facing Moral Distress with Moral Courage in Nursing Education

Jessica H. Ochs

Abstract

Moral distress, widely discussed in the nursing literature since it was first defined by Andrew Jameton in 1984, is recognized as the stress associated with the ethical elements of daily practice (Deschenes et al., 2020). The nursing work environment is widely acknowledged as being dynamic, stressful, and complex. Although it is often described in the clinical practice setting, moral distress arguably also occurs in nursing academia (Ganske, 2010; Ramos Toescher et al., 2020). In this paper, moral distress among nursing faculty will be explored and framed within the construct of moral courage as means to foster resilience and decrease the burnout and distress evident among faculty.

Key Words: moral distress, faculty burnout, moral courage, resilience

Background and Problem

Hamric (2012) defines moral distress as the anguish that occurs when one knows what the right thing to do is but believes that perceived or actual barriers or obligations prevent them from taking this ethical action. The emotional state that arises out of this situation creates feelings of powerlessness, anxiety, depression, and other nonspecific symptoms of feeling unwell (Stokes, 2017). In addition to these undesirable feelings that arise from moral distress, there is an additional layer of burnout, decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover that occurs (Epstein & Delgado, 2010). Despite a lack of primary studies in the arena of moral distress among nursing faculty, the anecdotal evidence is overwhelming. Moral distress in nursing faculty has been discussed informally for years surrounding issues of the insurmountable workload (expectations of teaching, scholarship, learning, and practice), the “corporate” mindset of academic institutions, the perception that students lack the desire to learn, the ‘failure to fail’ conundrum, and the push to move away from the ‘Sage on the Stage’ pedagogy towards a ‘Guide on the Side’ approach. The “corporate” mindset, the perception of the students’ lack of desire to learn, and the ‘failure to fail’ conundrum are inter-related as it comes down to nursing faculty being the “gatekeepers” of the profession (Debrew & Lewallen, 2014).

As mentioned, moral distress in nursing is associated with burnout, decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover (Epstein & Delgado, 2010). This is a problem as the United States (U.S.) is projected to experience a shortage of nurses over the next several years due to the aging Baby Boomer population, with the most intense shortages being in the Southern and Western parts of the country (American Association of Colleges of Nursing [AACN], 2020). Compounding this matter is the fact that nursing schools across the country are struggling to expand capacity to meet the rising demand for nursing education as the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics lists nursing as among the top occupations for job growth through the year 2029 (AACN, 2020).

To have great nurses to meet this demand, we need to have great nursing faculty. To have great nursing faculty, we need to address the burnout and moral distress experienced by these professionals. According to AACN's report on *2019-2020 Enrollment and Graduations in Baccalaureate and Graduate Programs in Nursing*, U.S. nursing schools turned away 80,407 qualified applications from nursing programs in 2019. Most nursing schools indicated faculty shortages as a top reason for limiting admissions into their programs (AACN, 2020). Compounding this problem is that the faculty age continues to grow as the average age of doctorally prepared nurse faculty is almost 57 years (AACN, 2020). Fang and Kesten (2017) found that about one third of current nursing faculty are expected to retire by 2025, underscoring the urgency and need to further develop and protect the newer generation of faculty and the current faculty from this burnout and moral distress by cultivating moral courage early.

Balancing Workload

Faculty workload has been a hot topic in academia for years. Expectations of teaching and mentoring along with the scholarship and service that is required at most academic institutions make it difficult for nursing faculty to maintain currency in nursing practice and education. The moral distress experienced by faculty may stem from a feeling of being unable to do it all well and even perhaps the inability to advocate for oneself better (Ramos Toescher et al., 2020).

Anecdotally, faculty mention feeling as if they have to keep “proving themselves” by publishing, presenting, researching, finding innovative ways to teach, taking on more advising duties or committee work. Eventually faculty find themselves asking, *when is enough, enough?* In a National League for Nursing (NLN) and Carnegie study on full-time nurse educator workload, almost half of respondents reported being dissatisfied with their workload and more than quarter of nurse educators said they were likely to leave their current job and cited the workload as a motivating factor (NLN, 2007).

Corporate Mindset. The *corporate mindset* of academic institutions has placed a great emphasis on student numbers. Recruiting and retaining students to increase the revenue stream have been at the forefront of academic institutions' strategies for survival. Yet with this mindset comes an expectation that students are the customer and therefore always right (Clay, 2008). The pressure to increase class sizes, and pass students, even if they are borderline, is immense. Anecdotally faculty report feeling pressure to allow increases in class size to the detriment of student learning and to take on more student advising to keep up with program demands. Additionally, faculty report feeling the need to constantly respond to student emails despite the hour.

Perceived Student Work Ethic

In a study by Ramos Toescher et al. (2020), nurse faculty felt moral distress when faced with students who seemed to lack the desire to learn. The perception that students lack a desire to learn has probably been discussed since almost the beginning of higher education. There are always students who are eager to learn and put their best foot forward but there are also the other students who are happy to eke by with a barely passing grade. These students create moral

distress for the faculty who devote time and energy to educating the future nurse workforce. The need to evolve one's teaching style from *sage on the stage* to *guide on the side* is one example of how these lackluster students create moral distress. Anecdotally a faculty member describes a situation in the classroom where she was literally dancing around and giving away prizes for participating in hands-on activities but felt she was getting nothing in return. This feeling of expending energy and time being innovative and creative yet getting no feedback or active participation from the students creates a sense of moral distress.

Failure to Fail Conundrum

Failure to fail in nursing is the concept of allocating passing grades to nursing students who have not met the student learning outcomes for a clinical course (Hughes et al., 2019). Nurse educators are charged with the incredible task of educating future nurses and being the “gatekeepers” of the profession (Debrew & Lewallen, 2014). Nurse educators struggle with failing a student in clinical coursework and therefore are confronted with the ethical conundrum of passing a student who demonstrates unsafe behavior. These nurse educators may feel hesitant to fail them as they may feel pressure from administration to pass the student, or they may feel conflicted due to personal knowledge of the student (Docherty, 2018; Luhanga et al., 2014). After a scoping review of the *failure to fail* phenomena, the following factors were identified as being related to this conundrum: Lack of confidence, time constraints, the “hassle factor”, role strain, lack of support, moral stress, emotionally challenging, fear of litigation, subjectivity of evaluation, and intimidating student behaviors.

Recommendations

Given the variety of etiologies of moral distress in nursing faculty, little attention has been paid to the actual level of distress experienced by these nurse educators. Extrapolating from the literature on moral distress in bedside nursing, the moral courage is a great way to address this distress in nursing faculty. Steps need to be taken to enhance and cultivate moral courage and resilience in nurses to assist in dealing with the moral distress often encountered in clinical practice (Gibson et al., 2020). Nurses who possess moral courage are better able to act in an ethically congruent manner despite challenges, as it helps them to advocate for their patients more effectively (Koshmehr et al., 2020).

Moral Courage

Moral courage in nursing has many different meanings but most agree it is a necessary trait for a nurse to have to promote optimal patient outcomes (Koshmehr et al., 2020). It often refers to a nurse taking action in the face of opposition to advocate on a patient's behalf (Ko et al., 2020; Gibson et al., 2020). Within nursing, moral courage is often framed within the larger context of moral distress. It has been argued that “moral courage relieves moral distress” as it allows the individual to restore integrity in response to moral adversity, thereby increases the overall well-being of the nurse as well as increasing the nurse's satisfaction and commitment to work (Holtz et al., 2018; Kleemola et al., 2020). In a metasynthesis on moral courage, nurses who possess

moral courage are better able to act in an ethically congruent manner despite challenges (Koshmehr et al., 2020). Ramos Toescher et al. (2020), nursing faculty experienced moral distress when they felt unable to speak up against the administration or other colleagues when attempting to advocate for themselves or their students but were able to relieve this distress with moral courage. This courage required a lot of support, education, and civility amongst the faculty and administration.

Fostering Moral Courage

From the authors' meta-synthesis on moral courage, encouraging ethical and self-reflection for providing a supportive environment to nursing faculty are potential strategies to foster moral courage. In addition to these strategies, it is important that the individual faculty member have the following qualities: an inner strength of honesty, moral character, perseverance, bravery, courage, and the ability to be present and admit one's own limitations. In summary, having skills of advocacy and being ethical are necessary traits to further cultivate moral courage. Nursing education administrators can foster this moral courage by creating a professional and supportive work environment where there is coaching and mentoring of faculty, shared meetings, and frequent reflections and debriefing of difficult student situations.

Conclusion

Moral distress exists in many fields of nursing including nursing academia (Ganske, 2010; Ramos Toescher et al., 2020). Further research is needed to better describe the distress experienced by nursing faculty as well as to quantify the extent of the distress. Once this is known, additional research can be undertaken to further explore how moral courage can address the moral distress experienced by nurse faculty and how to better cultivate and inspire it to decrease burnout.

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Strategic Instruction and Educational Technology That Create Foundations for Change in Adult Students Learning Quantitative Concepts

Diane Perilli

Abstract

This paper is a reflection on observing adult students' trepidations in learning accounting, and how thoughtfully designed instruction can help tackle this. It discusses experiences with supplementing instruction with technology tools to benefit teaching and learning. Student voices are shared that reflect their perceptions of feeling academically supported and their shifts in attitude and improved comfort level.

Key Words: Adult learning, instructional technology, academic support, math anxiety

As an accounting instructor at SUNY Empire State College, where most of our students are adults (average age is 36), frequently students have either explicitly expressed, or implied, shared their fear of math and of taking an accounting course. It is not uncommon for students to delay taking accounting until their last semester before graduating. Other signs of unease are shown when a student refers to the accounting course as a "math" course and/or asks if it meets the SUNY general education requirement for math (a requirement that all undergraduate students are expected to fulfill). Many have a mind-set that, as younger students, they were not good at math and this has followed them into adulthood. Carol Dweck (2007) referred to this as a "fixed mind-set." In addition, accounting courses carry a reputation of being "hard" among college students. Recognizing this, I have explored different ways to make accounting instruction approachable to students to make them feel more comfortable and open to learning. To accomplish this, my teaching philosophy involves active learning, iterative process, and delivery of instruction in various forms.

Instructional Strategies

I tackle students' fear of math, in several ways. First, by explaining that they use math and numbers more than they realize, and I discuss a few examples of that everyday practice. Second, we approach the concepts in small chunks and do not move forward until each step along the way is understood. The next step is repetition. I believe repetition is integral in quantitative studies and have designed my courses to provide that. While I embrace technology, I believe in traditional methods such as having students work with pencil and paper to solve problems. Doing the work by hand is another layer of processing the material. In a classroom setting, I teach a concept as I apply it to a problem that we do together (involving active learning). The students then do a similar problem by themselves during class time. This step, I believe, provides a

valuable bridge towards confidence. Similar problems are assigned for practice at home for additional repetition.

Use of Technology Tools

One modality for delivering instruction at SUNY Empire is guided independent study (either at a distance or face-to-face). In this modality, a teacher may have up to 20 students learning the same material in the same term. I regularly teach in this mode, at a distance, and have found instructional technology tools instrumental to students' learning. In my guided independent study Introductory Accounting I course, for example, assignments are completed using a publisher created web-based assignment system. Within this system, students are assigned similar (algorithmic) problems for practice so that they can review the same concept repeatedly without impacting their grade. Additionally, students get immediate feedback on their results and have an opportunity to continue working on the same problem until the answer is correct. It is an effective learning tool, and most students find these systems to be extremely helpful. Students have made comments that they appreciate the immediate feedback and opportunity to make corrections while working asynchronously. O'Leary et al. (2017) determined that math anxiety was lowered for students whose teachers provided plenty of examples, under the theory that exposing students to *more* math may help them.

I supplement this asynchronous independent study course with virtual synchronous class (group) meetings, via a web-conferencing system (Microsoft TEAMS). The meetings are intended to provide academic support through direct instruction and to help create a community of learners. Participation in these meetings is voluntary, but strongly encouraged. I conduct the meetings as if we are in a classroom where I would introduce and explain concepts, have a group discussion, and do problems together. Supplementing this asynchronous course with synchronous meetings proved to be successful. Approximately 50% of the enrolled students voluntarily attended. I had surveyed previous students, and over 90% of the students who attended the meetings felt academically supported and believed they understood the material better because of their participation. Furthermore, the students requested more meetings than I had originally scheduled.

Another technology resource with which I supply my students are recordings of my course instruction: I record the virtual synchronous group meetings (referred to above) and my face-to-face classroom section. These recordings are posted in our learning management system, Moodle, and are available to the students at their convenience. In viewing the recordings, students have another opportunity to process the material; they can replay the parts of the class with which they need help. This can give additional opportunity for students who need extra reinforcement of the content or who are English language learners who may benefit from hearing the lesson again. This kind of access and flexibility are important to adult students.

In addition to the above, I have recorded 3–5-minute tutorials of foundational material and topics. Accounting, and many other quantitative courses, often build on themselves; therefore, supplying students with these tutorials allow the students an opportunity to be refreshed on earlier material and as needed. These recordings are posted in our learning management system.

Observations of Improved Comfort and Attitude

The instructional techniques that I have implemented have helped some students overcome their anxiety around numbers/math/accounting. They were surprised that they were able to learn accounting and, achieve a successful outcome. Some even expressed a desire to continue taking accounting courses. Here are selected comments from students that reflect this outcome:

“Accounting sounded intimidating to me. The [virtual] sessions with [Prof.] Perilli helped me understand what I was reading or preparing to read.”

“The virtual meetings assisted me in comprehending the material and helped me to succeed. I find that math is a tough course to learn on your own. I could not imagine taking a math [accounting] course any other way...”

“...I ended up enjoying Accounting the most out of all my classes this semester - and I never would have expected that...”

“Thank you for all the help this year, you have made my confidence soar!”

“This mentor really knew how to simplify the learning experience for accounting. This is my favorite subject now. Before it wasn't.”

“This was my most challenging course and I truly felt I learned a lot which will help me in my career. [I am] grateful to this mentor for working with my fears and insecurities.”

As seen in these student voices, there is an improved comfort level and attitude. They also show that these positive changes may have helped to strengthen their overall learning of the material.

Summary

It is my experience that providing opportunities for active learning, chunking the material, using an iterative process, and supplying extra practice contribute to a learning environment that is well received by students. Additionally, strategically using synchronous and asynchronous technology tools provide well-rounded learning activities. All these methods taken together create a setting that encompasses and responds to different learning styles. It has shown to be fruitful particularly for students who are apprehensive about learning quantitative concepts. O’Leary, et al (2017) found that a teacher who is flexible and willing to deliver instruction in different ways, can contribute to better success for math anxious students.

I have benefited, as well, from using technology tools because it has reduced the need to repeat instruction. Another advantage of using technology is that after the initial time investment needed to learn how to use these tools and setting up the resources, future work can be reduced. For example, some recordings and other resources can easily be carried over into other semesters. On a personal level, I feel rewarded to hear that adult students are overcoming long term unease with using numbers, enjoy their learning in my course and express appreciation of these outcomes. I am pleased and grateful to be part of a process of improved student learning and attitudes.

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Impeding Transformative Learning: Combatting the Dunning-Kruger Effect

Megan L. Small & Patricia Holt

Abstract

Transformative learning refers to the phenomenon of individuals experience an event or information that changes or replaces their current beliefs (Baumgartner, 2001; Mezirow, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000; Nutt & Backoff, 1997). Being able to have transformative learning experience hinges upon one's ability to self-reflect, which can be impeded by the Dunning-Kruger effect (Dunning, 2011; Hinner, 2020; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). The Dunning-Kruger effect occurs when an individual is unable to recognize the deficits in their knowledge and displays an overconfidence in their abilities (Dunning, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). The Dunning-Kruger effect can be overcome by educators who promote metacognitive skills in their teaching, and by promoting cultural competency through multicultural and diversity awareness (Booker et al., 2016; Hinner, 2020; Shen & Liu, 2011).

Key Words: Transformative learning, Dunning-Kruger effect

Transformative learning refers to the phenomenon when an individual experiences a change in their frame of reference that leads to the development or creation of new beliefs (Baumgartner, 2001; Mezirow, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000; Nutt & Backoff, 1997). This ability to experience transformative learning experiences hinges on humans' ability to self-reflect, or metacognition. Metacognition refers to the uniquely human ability to recognize that there are unknowns that exist outside of one's own realm of knowledge (Huang, 2013). Deficits in metacognitive abilities can lead to individuals displaying the Dunning-Kruger effect, an experience characterized by individuals favorably viewing their own social or intellectual skills without merit (Dunning, 2011; Huang, 2013; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Thus, these individuals overestimate their abilities due to suffering from a dual burden: not only are these individuals grossly overestimating their skills, but they lack the metacognitive ability to realize their own ignorance (Dunning, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

Since individuals displaying the Dunning-Kruger effect may lack metacognitive abilities and self-reflection skills, they may experience a more difficult time experiencing a transformational learning experience. Thankfully, prior research has found it possible to increase individuals' metacognitive abilities by providing metacognitive training in conjunction with multicultural education and diversity training (Burkhardt, 2017; Hinner, 2020; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Shen & Liu, 2011). Many of these methods can be adapted into several adult education settings to promote self-reflection and metacognitive skills.

Transformative Learning

Transformative, or transformational, learning is the phenomenon wherein an individual experiences an effecting change in a frame of reference (Baumgartner, 2001; Mezirow, 1991, 1996, 1997, 2000; Nutt & Backoff, 1997). Adults acquire frames of reference throughout their lifelong experiences, culminated from associations, values, feelings, concepts, and conditioned responses, and they are the structures that define one's worldview (Mezirow, 1997). Many things in a person's life can affect the way they view the world around them, most notably perception and culture. One's culture greatly affects the norms, mores, and beliefs they choose to adopt and believe to be "normal," and their perception is what affects their interpretations of the world around them.

Naturally, culture and perception are vital things to consider when approaching a person's ability to experience transformative learning episodes. Perception is also one of the most important aspects of the Dunning-Kruger effect, particularly in regard to one's ability to self-reflect or on metacognitive abilities (Dunning, 2011; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Thankfully, there does exist several research-backed solutions to help educators get their students through the Dunning-Kruger effect.

The Dunning-Kruger Effect

The Dunning-Kruger effect was aptly named by David Dunning and Justin Kruger (1999) when they performed 4 different studies that tested participants on tests of humor, grammar, and logic and compared those scores with the participants' own estimates of their test performance and abilities. One group of individuals predicted that their scores would be in the 62nd percentile, but they actually fell in the 12th percentile—this was a severe miscalibration on their behalf (Kruger & Dunning, 1999). This miscalibration was cited to be due to deficits in metacognitive skills, also described as the capacity to distinguish error and accuracy (Huang, 2013; Kruger & Dunning, 1999).

In his advances, David Dunning further explains that the most important assertion with the Dunning-Kruger effect is that the single most thing people are most likely to be ignorant of is the extent of their own ignorance (Dunning, 2011). In fact, he poses that it is nearly impossible for one to quantify what it is they do not know, and as such, it is unfair to demand that people somehow have an impossible ability to surmise the extent of their own ignorance (Dunning, 2011). Metacognition was previously discussed but is important to also acknowledge the existence of meta-ignorance. Meta-ignorance refers to the inability to know the unknowns in our realm of knowledge (Dunning, 2011; Huang, 2013).

It is understandable that people are incapable of being able to comprehend their own ignorance, and Dunning (2011) posited several reasons that this happens. The first reason is that ignorance lies in the realm of "unknown unknowns" (Dunning, 2011). Information that people have and know they have can be classified as "known knows," and information that a person lacks and knows they lack can be classified as "known unknowns" (Dunning, 2011). The concept of

“unknown unknowns” is most important to consider regarding the Dunning-Kruger effect, and refers to the gaps in one’s realm of knowledge that they are unaware of. In fact, it is quite easy for unknown unknowns to go unrecognized in one’s life due to their very nature.

Another reason ignorance goes unrecognized is due to Dunning’s (2011) claim that ignorance can be disguised by domain-specific misbeliefs, which refers to the mistakes and misconceptions that people possess even with objects that they interact with frequently. For example, a study performed by Kuklinski and colleagues (2000) displayed this phenomenon when they surveyed opinions about the welfare program in the United States and found that the most confident responders believed that 25% of families in the United States received welfare, when the reality is closer to 7%. Additionally, participants that stated they believed 15% of the national budget went to welfare were just as confident as participants that estimated the true statistic of 1% (Kuklinski et al, 2000).

The last major reason Dunning (2011) discusses that may lead to ignorance going unseen is by being disguised by “reach-around” knowledge, characterized by over-claiming (Paulhus et al., 2003) or nonattitudes (Bishop et al., 1986). Over-claiming occurs when individuals claim their knowledge of an area to be better than it truly is. Paulhus and colleagues (2003) discovered this when they asked participants to rate their knowledge of 150 topics, 30 of which were nonexistent and made-up by the researchers. Participants claimed to have knowledge of 44% of the real topics and claimed the same for about 25% of the fake, nonexistent topics—thus, this tendency came to be known as over-claiming (Paulhus et al., 2003).

Overcoming the Dunning-Kruger Effect

Due to the very nature of the Dunning-Kruger effect, being ignorant of one’s own ignorance can inevitably lead to intolerance (Dunning, 2011; Hinner, 2020; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). Because of this, focusing on fostering tolerant and inclusive learning environments may prove vital in conjunction with utilizing teaching tactics that promote metacognitive skills (Hinner, 2020). When focusing on issues like intolerance, it is important to consider human identity. Prior research has found that individuals with negative self-image display poor self-worth and are more likely because of this to form negative stereotypes and opinions of others, and thus become more intolerant of others (Adler et al., 2020; Gamble & Gamble, 2012; Hinner, 2020). Thus, programs designed to decrease intolerance must focus on individuals’ personal identities. Furthermore, it is also recommended that educators be able to recognize individuals with negative self-image and low self-esteem to target them to receive individualized instruction and self-help training (Hinner, 2020).

Perception also plays an important and decisive role in human interaction by determining what people notice, ignore, or misunderstand. This is why an understanding of perception is vital to understanding intolerance and ignorance. By this definition, culture and perception can be argued to be interrelated with each other, as cultures that individuals are raised in strongly affect their perceptions of the world and even other groups of people. By acknowledging this, we can begin to figure out how to tackle the issue with students.

Educational Solutions

While it may sound intimidating to attempt to combat the Dunning-Kruger effect, many studies have found several methods that educators can employ. The biggest issue surrounding individuals displaying the Dunning-Kruger effect comes down to a lack of metacognitive skills and abilities (Dunning, 2011; Huang, 2013; Kruger & Dunning, 1999). This uniquely human ability to conceptualize realms of knowledge outside one's own can always be improved upon, and educators can employ several different methods to assist in improving their students' metacognitive abilities. Instruction in metacognition can be used to overcome ignorance and the intolerance that it often produces by promoting skills in self-reflection (Dunning, 2011; Hinner, 2020; Kruger & Dunning, 1999), and can be coupled with multicultural education (Hinner, 2020), teaching techniques that promote metacognitive skills (Grossman, 2008; Shen & Liu, 2011), and by having educators go through diversity training (Booker et al., 2016). By employing one or more of these solutions, educators can better equip their students with the necessary skills to better experience episodes of transformational learning.

First, because many issues tied to concerns of perception or intolerance stem from social factors, curriculum needs to be flexible and able to be adjusted for individuals with different needs. In fact, many researchers have argued and found that knowledge of other cultures can be helpful in overcoming intolerance by explaining what other people believe in, and in turn, provide an understanding as to why people may behave the way they do (Adler et al., 2020; Hinner, 2020; Samover et al., 2017). Knowledge of other cultures to promote cultural sensitivity on its own may even be enough to cause its own transformative learning experience that leads to helping overcome their own intolerance (Hinner, 2020; Kruger & Dunning, 1999; Samover et al., 2017).

Additionally, other research has found that even just having faculty members participate in diversity awareness training can be beneficial for their students. Booker and colleagues (2016) provided training in multicultural and diverse perspectives and then conducted focus groups on the students of faculty with and without this training. Just from having postsecondary faculty participate in this training, students reported feeling greater senses of community, personal growth, and conflict resolution skills just by being taught by these faculty members (Booker et al., 2016). The need for culturally competent faculty members will more than likely continue to increase as the face of "traditional" college students continue to change and the demographics of higher education include more diverse groups.

Promoting cultural competency is not the only thing educators can do though. Instructors can utilize educational tools to help promote their students' self-reflection and metacognitive skills several ways. Shen and Liu (2011) developed a web-based approach for higher education meant to develop metacognitive skills that any instructor can use to their advantage. This approach used web tools for courses to teach students to self-plan, self-monitor, and self-evaluate by integrating materials about metacognitive skills with the use of metacognitive strategies. Web-based courses should be designed according to the metacognitive skills of scaffolding, problem-solving, inquiry, summarization, concept mapping, and visualization and doing this can be as simple as organizing instructions into a concept map or providing a structure that allows students to see

when they missed an assignment (Shen & Liu, 2011). With technology becoming integrated more into higher education, many in-person courses can utilize these same techniques with the web-based sources that college courses tend to have regardless of instructional setting.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Dunning-Kruger effect can happen to anybody regardless of their intelligence level. While the Dunning-Kruger effect could very well impede the ability to experience transformative learning, an educator versed in recognizing self-reflection and perception skills should be able to assist any adult student in overcoming their own intolerance. Furthermore, the promotion of multicultural awareness and cultural competency may trigger a transformative learning experience on its own, and thus be able to prompt further ones to occur. The same can be said for promoting metacognitive skills through courses. That is, instructors promoting metacognitive skills through course strategies have the potential to improve students' self-reflection skills, and thus make them more open to being able to experience an episode of transformative learning.

Future research in this area should focus on bridging the current gap between previous tests of the Dunning-Kruger effect and the more culturally relevant issues of cultural competency. Additionally, it would be worthwhile for researchers to pursue connections between metacognitive abilities and multicultural and diversity awareness and sensitivity to further aid in developing methods of overcoming intolerance.

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The Nature and Function of CBO Systems of Support for Black Women at the Intersections of Trauma, Anxiety, Depression, and HIV/AIDS amid a Global Pandemic

Mattyna Stephens

Abstract

This study focuses on the impact of the global pandemic on the HIV/AIDS efforts for Black women living with HIV/AIDS (BWLHA). The narratives of two community-based organization (CBO) service providers are offered. I employ qualitative methods in this study because they illuminate and holistically capture Black women's experiences. Examining the narratives of the study participants, the impact of social isolation (anxiety, depression), medical and telehealth concerns, and informal teaching and learning as the main themes. The impact of pandemics can be traumatizing. Through informal learning programming CBOs' service providers can teach Black women living with HIV/AIDS to develop trauma care plans informed by adult learning principles to navigate intersecting life experiences, especially during life altering situations as a result of a global pandemic.

Key Words: anxiety, BWLHA, trauma care plans, CBOs, pandemic

The coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in the United States and claimed the lives of more than 200,000 Americans (Cooper et al., 2020). A shelter-in-place mandate was implemented to advance public health goals. This mandate meant CBOs would have to alter the way in which they serviced their clients to avoid further widespread of the virus (i.e., COVID-19) (Pinto & Park, 2020). This abrupt change posed many challenges for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), particularly for Black women. According to Black Women's Health Imperative (2019) CBOs' workforce often comprise health educators to help BWLHA to access testing services, medical professionals for the uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), other medicinal services, social workers, medical and non-medical case management, and support services for BWLHA who are at risk for falling out of care.

Due to the lack of attention given to BWLHA, I became interested in exploring this topic with greater intensity. While exploring the literature, there were significant amounts of research on the effects of stigma on BWLHA (Sangaramoorthy et al., 2017), and social determinant factors that place Black women at risk for HIV/AIDS (Davis & Tucker-Brown, 2013). However, the literature searches describing the impact of the coronavirus on the care and treatment efforts for BWLHA were insignificant. As a result, I became interested in this phenomenon. The research questions that guided the study were: (1) how has the pandemic disrupted CBOs' HIV/AIDS efforts for BWLHA; (2) how has the global pandemic affected the health and well-being of BWLHA; and (3) what adult learning strategies and resources do CBO service providers offer to BWLHA to strengthen and protect their health during a global pandemic?

Relevant Literature

Nydegger et al. (2020) named violence both structural and intimate partner violence as a contributing factor to the increased risk of HIV/AIDS among Black women. Furthermore, the lives of many Black women often insect marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, and violence. As of 2017, Black women accounted for 59% of newly diagnosed cases of HIV in the United States (Geter et al., 2019), whereas White and Latino women accounted for only 20% and 16%, respectively. Findings from qualitative studies revealed, stigmatization has greatly impacted BWLHA (Sangaramoorthy et al., 2017). Since CBOs' workforce provide formal, nonformal, and informal learning across the lifespan, Gailbraith (1995) often referred to these workers as adult educators. The deleterious impact of HIV/AIDS beckon the attention of CBOs to offer advocacy, education, and treatment and care for BWLHA (Operario et al., 2020).

Operario et al., (2020) indicated CBOs faced many challenges in the wake of the global pandemic. CBOs experienced such challenges as a decrease in the resources provided, immediate disruption in socializing opportunities for clients, and immediate separation from clients creating social isolation (Marziali et al., 2020; Operario et al., 2020). Social isolation is far more daunting for BWLHA as many of them live in poverty. In a study conducted by Chenneville et al. (2020) it was discovered that BWLHA experienced bouts of depression which was largely due to social isolation which led to setbacks and the derailing of existing efforts for treatment and care (Chenneville). As such, for this research, the narratives of CBO service providers were publicized to begin conversations that explore the impact of the novel coronavirus on the HIV/AIDS efforts of CBOs providing services to BWLHA. Moreover, this research is a way of placing a call to action for further exploration of the phenomenon. Black Feminist Theory (BFT) was used to frame the study. For BWLHA, their lived experiences may intersect poverty, marginalization, racism, violence, and trauma. Hill-Collins (1990) indicated that intersectionalities is an element of BFT. As such, BFT helped frame the research on BWLHA amid a global pandemic from the positionalities of CBOs service providers.

Methods

I employed qualitative methods in this study because they illuminate and holistically capture Black women's experiences (Lani et al., 2014). A purposeful sampling technique was utilized to select participants who "can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). To recruit participants, I sent a message to an HIV Syndicate listserv and provided a brief description of the research to elicit interest. To help inform a larger study, only two participants were chosen for this study. One of the participants had nearly 20 years of experience, and the other participant had nearly five years of experience.

In the research, Brookfield (2013) indicated that storytelling is a viable tool for data collection as it helps individuals to think more deeply about their experiences as well as life's most captivating moments. As such, storytelling method was utilized for data collection purposes. Each of the participants' short stories were developed into complete narratives (DeMedeiros & Etter-Lewis, 2020). Then, the narratives were analyzed using three approaches including

Alexander's (1988) principles of salience (only five principles were applied for analysis), Denzin's (1989) life narratives approach, and Johnson-Bailey's (2002) cultural analysis. Participants were allowed the opportunity to review their narratives to help contextualize their experiences. This technique was used as a method for measuring trustworthiness.

Findings

For this research CBOs' service providers were identified as Narrator 1 and Narrator 2. Examining the experiences of the study participants, the impact of social isolation (anxiety, depression), medical and telehealth concerns, and informal teaching and learning emerged as the main themes.

Impact of Social Isolation. As humans, we are wired to engage in social networks. However, when we become socially isolated, it causes increased levels of anxiety and depression which significantly impacts our health (Singer, 2018). The shelter-in-place mandates led to social isolation, which created feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression among the women. Narrator 1 recalled what seemed to be a client expressing their experience with anxiety during a listening session:

I am 39 years old, but I feel like I am 90. I have a heart issue, cholesterol, and high blood pressure. I cannot take it any longer. I am going nuts (listening session).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the women participated in the weekly in-person group meetings. Their inability to connect physically with individual group members during the pandemic impacted their mental health. Narrator 2 recalled a client expressing feelings of anxiety due to the inability to have physical contact with support group members:

Not being able to talk to the other women has really done something to me. I really need this time to talk through some things.

Both Narrators 1 and 2 recalled instances when clients needed immediate attention. Narrator 1 recalled instances of clients contemplating suicide, due to the pressures of being socially isolated. In such instances, Narrator 1 would dial the suicide prevention hotline to solicit the assistance of a qualified person to offer the needed support. Narrator 2 also described an incident when a client called seemingly in a state of depression. With immediacy, Narrator 2 contacted the group facilitator, who in turn contacted members of the distressed client's support group. By making the connection with the members through a virtual platform, it helped the client to manage those feelings of depression. Narrator 2 recalled an incident where a client called into the agency to express gratitude for the way in which they responded to her needs:

Thank you for connecting me with the group. To hear their voices and to see their faces gave me the opportunity to get some human interaction that I am not getting.

Some of the women lived with roommates. The shelter-in-place mandate made it increasingly difficult for them to conceal their diagnoses. The balancing act of being withdrawn without raising suspicions became difficult, which increased some women's anxiety levels. Both Narrator

2 and 1 recalled how clients experienced increased levels of anxiety trying to conceal their diagnoses while living with roommates, respectively:

I live with my cousins. They do not know that I am HIV positive. I try not to be around them too much. It is crazy. I must think about my health and at the same time try to stay away from them.

Some of my family members live with me. They say that I am too private. I cannot tell them I am HIV positive. They will tell everybody. So, I distance myself from them.

Narrator 2 remembered clients indicating due to the increased stressed levels brought on by the lack of social interaction caused many of the women to consider reverting to their old habits and addictions:

I am so stressed out. Not being able to speak to people face-to-face makes me want to go back to drinking and smoking.

My daughter mistreats me. I just feel like drinking. It gets really hard for me sometimes.

The arguing back and forth is driving me crazy. If I say blue, he says green. Everything does not have to be an argument. It is enough to make you want to have a drink.

Medical and Telehealth Concerns. For many clients, telehealth (i.e., virtual healthcare) was the only method for interacting with a health care provider. Given the nature of their diagnosis, some women felt their health concerns were not being taken seriously due to their inability to see a medical professional in person. Narrator 1 recalled client's issues with telehealth:

Medical professionals are working from home. If you are working from home, you are not dealing with me.

You call me so the hospital can charge my Medicare, but what did you really do for me? What did you really accomplish with me? You did not get to put me on a scale. You did not get anything effective going on.

My primary care doctor—I expect them to look at the whole of me. The pandemic started in March. I need some labs done; not just for HIV. Labs can tell a lot about a person's health. I have 11 different doctors that I see.

Narrator 1 and 2 recalled clients having trouble gaining access to their medication, which was also an indication of medical professionals failing to address their healthcare needs appropriately:

They [agencies] are not taking walk-ins. I have not been able to take my meds for about 8 or 9 days.

What am I supposed to do if I cannot get my medicine? I have been trying to call the pharmacy, but I have not been able to get in touch with anyone. I do not want to go all the way up there and not be able to get my medicine.

Here, some of the women expressed issues with medication. When PLWHA are unable to access medication, it can impact viral load suppression.

Informal Teaching and Learning. According to Golding (2011), “Informal learning occurs through all kinds of activities in the daily lives of every person in a wide range of social contexts through families, workplace, communities, and leisure activities” (p. 104). Narrator 2 recommended skills for meditative practices to help the women manage their feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety. Since the clients could not meet in person during the pandemic, Narrator 2 mailed the clients copies of strategies for meditation along with websites that offered such strategies. Narrator 2 offered client’s statements:

It [meditation strategies] takes some real concentrating, but the activities kind of relax your body.

It [meditation strategies] gives me something to do. Meditation takes my mind off the world. I am glad you gave us this information.

Narrator 2 also offered a personal statement regarding the benefits of meditation:

I do not profess to be an expert and I am not an instructor of any kind. However, practicing meditation strategies has helped me to become more relaxed and focused. Through meditation, I am better able to address issues that may occur. I am still learning various techniques.

Narrator 2 recalled a client hinting at the idea of offering meditative practices through a virtual platform:

These activities would be great for the women’s group.

For learning purposes, Narrator 1 encouraged clients to engage in various learning activities including, online workshops, panel discussions, and webinars. She also suggested that the women review various reading materials both online and available hard copy literature. As well, she recommended that the women connect with systems of support like “sister circles” and other networking systems offering current information about HIV/AIDS related issues along with other outlets providing information about other personal interests. Narrator 1 vehemently warned against watching television. Narrator 1 wanted the women to use this time of isolation for learning. Narrator 1 offered these learning strategies:

I told them [women] sitting in front of the television is not doing anything for you. You need to keep your brain functioning ...reading and learning. There are all sorts of materials ... webinars ... listening sessions ... support groups for Black women.

In some instances, clients faced situations in which they felt they were being treated unfairly. During such times, they would often seek the guidance of Narrator 1 to help them manage times of unfair treatment. Narrator 1 would allow clients to listen in on calls to gain strategies to help them develop skills for advocacy. Narrator 1 inserted a personal account:

Developing skills for advocacy is important. See, when women can stand up for themselves, it gets people’s attention. It also builds self-confidence because many Black women living with HIV/AIDS have developed learned helplessness.

Discussion

According to Moss (2020), trauma is the result of an event or a series of events that can cause physical or emotional harm or become life threatening. Mornin (2020) indicated the impact of a global pandemic can be traumatizing. In response to the pandemic, people were ordered to shelter-in-place, forcing CBOs to alter how they provided services to the women. The alterations included: separating “the agency” from the clients (us/them), preventing the women from having physical contact with CBOs’ service providers, healthcare providers, or members of their support groups, and suspending home visits with caseworkers. Such experiences can have long lasting adverse effects on individual’s physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual welfare (Mornin, 2020).

To help ameliorate anxiety and depression, the women were encouraged to engage in activities for meditation. Lapina (2018) indicated, through the participation in meditative activities, it helps the body respond to relaxation more favorably. Clients were also given the opportunity to learn self-advocacy strategies. When women can self-advocate for needed services, this is indicative of them being self-directed in their experiences (Brookfield, 2013). Engaging in forms of support groups like “sister circles” were recommended. Collins (1986) often refers to the interpersonal relationships or the gathering of Black women as a “sisterhood” (p. 22). Many of the women believed their health concerns were not being prioritized as many of them were forced to visit with healthcare professional through various media platforms. Onos (2020) revealed that Black women’s health concerns are often dismissed, misdiagnosed, or not taken seriously which can lead to more serious illnesses or, even death.

Implications and Conclusion

BWLHA face existing stressors associated with HIV/AIDS, the distress associated with pandemics can increase the impact of trauma. This study serves to widen the lens of adult and higher education. Through informal learning practices, CBOs’ service providers can teach adult learners like BWLHA to develop trauma care plans (TCP). TCP can do the following: remind adult learners to provide self-care during crisis situations; provide self-care strategies when triggered by certain events; remind the learner who to notify and specific strategies to implement when they are not well; and remove the guesswork when receiving support (Moss, 2020). When developing TCP, they should be informed by adult learning principles to help (BWLHA) navigate intersecting life experiences, especially during life altering situations because of global pandemics.

In conclusion, this study explored how the impact of the global pandemic on the treatment and care efforts for BWLHA through the experiences of CBOs’ service providers. The narratives publicizing the women’s experiences may not be completely unique but are important to address if we (adult educators) want BWLHA to learn strategies for trauma care informed by adult learning principles.

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Academic Support on the Web: Graduate Student Use and Perceptions of Usefulness of Web Resources and Tools

Kelly Grieneisen Tillotson & Glenda A. Gunter

Abstract

This paper summarizes a mixed methods research study conducted at the University of Central Florida (UCF) that examined graduate student perceptions and use of Web resources and tools for academic support. An electronic survey was administered to collect qualitative and quantitative data from a sample consisting of 998 participants. Data analysis revealed that file-sharing tools and telecommunications applications were the most utilized Web resources and tools and perceived by participants as most useful. Zoom and Google Docs were identified as being used most often, which is consistent with the perceptions and frequency of use in the data analysis. Participants reported using Web resources and tools most often for supporting course work, and additionally for academic collaboration, research, and cloud support.

Key Words: web resources, web tools, higher education, graduate students, online learning

Students in higher education have always had access to resources and tools to help support their academic endeavors. The digital age has expanded the types of tools and resources that are available and the way that they can be accessed and utilized. Countless Web resources and tools provide students with various types of academic support, such as aiding in collaboration, support for coursework and research, and assisting with organization and management of academic materials. Research studies like Lai and Hong (2015) have shown that students spend a substantial amount of time engaging with digital technologies that are utilized in a myriad of ways. Understanding which resources and tools that students are using most often and how they are supporting student academics could help educational leaders to highlight these useful resources and potentially provide a greater access to these tools.

The following article is a summary of a mixed methods research study that was conducted by Grieneisen Tillotson (2020) at the University of Central Florida. The study examined how Web resources and tools were being utilized by graduate students to assist in achieving academic goals. The study also examined student's perceptions of the usefulness amongst the Web resources and tools. This research can provide a better understanding of how Web tools and resources are used by students can assist with decisions concerning the offering of useful workshops and trainings to provide students with professional development opportunities. Providing training opportunities can help students gain awareness of resources, knowledge, and understanding of how Web tools and resources can be used to support their academics.

This research study also provides additional information to assist educational leaders with making decisions about the purchase of or providing access to specific Web resources and tools that graduate students would be able to use. Supporting students with resources and tools, as well as providing professional development opportunities to learn how to successfully utilize them, could strengthen student perseverance and persistence to meet their academic goals. These resources can be part of the support used to retain students in the higher education setting.

Frameworks

Previous research and instructional theories were examined for the study with a specific focus on technology and its connection with learning and higher education. Theory frameworks assisted with development of a research approach, research questions, data collection and interpretation. The two frameworks that were examined and used in this research were Connectivism and Personal Learning Networks. These frameworks focus on the potential benefits of technology-based information, resources, and tools, such as gaining new information through these technologies and using technology tools as part of a learning network.

Siemens (2004) was the developer of Connectivism theory which proposes the idea that knowledge is held within technical systems and system users gain knowledge through interactions with these systems. Learning can take place by using the technical systems and interacting with the information that resides within the system and its components. The Internet has expanded all types of learning environments and they continue to expand with new information and new resources. Due to these technological advances the way we think about learning as also changed and evolved (Utecht & Keller, 2019). Learning with online resources and tools has been reported can enhance learning through the idea of Connectivism. This theory expands learning opportunities to a vast range of resources and content which are not limited or confined like some learning avenues, as content on a specific topic can have a larger presence of material for a learner to interact with and browse through.

Personal learning Networks (PNL) support the concept of student learning being supported and enhanced through an abundance of available information, resources, and tools on the Web. Research conducted by Goria et al. (2019) observed that PLNs have grown along with the expansion of available digital technologies and resources. Students use of PLNs "...highlight the central role of personal and professional connections of the individual through social media, digital tools, and other communication media, including offline ones" (Goria et al., p. 90). These learning networks are generally student centered and help students to use resources for problem solving and building cognitive function that will be used for lifelong learning (Tsang & Tsui, 2017).

Methodology

This research study was conducted at the University of Central Florida (UCF). UCF is a research university that offers undergraduate and graduate programs, located in the metropolitan area of Orlando (University of Central Florida, n.d.). During Fall 2019 semester, enrollment was over

69,000 students, with 9,549 students making up the graduate student population (UCF Institutional Knowledge Management, 2020). The graduate student classifications breakdown as 2290 doctoral, 6569 master's, 312 professional certificate, and 378 graduate students classified as "Other." A wide variety of graduate programs are offered at UCF, including doctoral, specialist, masters, and graduate certificate programs.

A pilot study was first conducted utilizing a small sample from the UCF graduate student population. The pilot study was conducted to review the internal validity of the survey, and a Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the two Likert-type scale survey questions. The Cronbach's Alpha calculation was .82 (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020), and this would be classified as good or adequate in Taber's (2018) study of Cronbach Alpha results. This measurement provided support that the instrument may have adequate reliability. After a review of the survey questions and collected data, several minor updates were made to the electronic survey producing the survey used for the main study.

The population for this study consisted of UCF graduate students that had an active status in Summer 2020 term, the total was 11,545 students (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). All graduate students with active status in the term, regardless of enrollment, were emailed an invitation and link to participate anonymously in the online survey. Of the sample population, 998 graduate students completed the survey administered by the researcher (Grieneisen Tillotson).

This study employed a mixed methods design with quantitative and qualitative data collection that used an electronic Qualtrics survey. The survey consisted of ten questions with the main purpose to collect data for four research questions. The four research questions developed as the focus of this study were (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020):

1. What Web resources and tools are graduate students using most frequently to support their academic course work, research, and/or other academic goals?
2. What are the differences in the frequency of student usage of Web resources and tools based on enrollment in a fully online, blended or face-to-face programs?
3. What are the graduate student perceptions of usefulness regarding the Web resources and tools that they are using to support their academic goals?
4. How are students using the resources and tools that they perceive as useful?

In the development of the online survey, research and instruments were reviewed regarding Web resources and tools used in higher education. The survey questions were adapted from this evaluation. From the review, 13 Web resources and tools categories were identified and designed to be categories on the survey. Many of the identified survey categories were derived from a research study conducted by Hartshorne and Ajjan (2009) that examined benefits recognized by student's regarding Web 2.0 tool used in coursework and contributing motivations for use. The 13 Web resources and tools categories were used in two Likert-type scale questions on the survey where participants were asked to identify their frequency of use and perceptions of usefulness. The categories consisted of blogs, online surveys, wikis, social networking, social

bookmarking, instant messaging, telecommunications applications, data analysis applications, reference management tools, video-sharing, webinars, file-sharing tools, and note-taking applications. An additional “Other” category was available where write-in answers could be included.

Data analysis for the survey questions consisted of several methods. For research question one and three that used the Likert-type scale, descriptive statistics were utilized for data review (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). Research question number two was examined using an ANOVA one way test. The fourth research questions reviewed qualitative data for common themes (Grieneisen Tillotson). The following section will highlight the research findings.

Findings

The online survey collected data from 998 graduate student participants. Review of the four survey sections and data analysis was conducted. Highlights from the demographic and academic information revealed that 61% of the participants identified that they were Master’s-level students, 26% Doctoral, 8% Graduate Certificate, 4% Other, and 1% Specialist. Full-time students represented a greater number of the participants with 623, and 371 identifying part-time status. The program mode that participants were enrolled in was identified with 365 students in face-to-face programs, 350 in mixed-mode programs, and 278 in fully online programs.

Research Question One

Research question one focused on Web tools and resources that graduate students were using to support their course work, research, and academic goals. Table 1 is a summary of the top five Web tools and resources that were identified by participants as “Always Use” and “Frequently Use”. These two rankings were separated on the survey but combined in this table as a summary. File-sharing tools were identified as being used by almost three quarters of the participants, and Telecommunication Applications by well over half of the respondents. The top four applications all have a collaborative function as the main component of their application which points to the importance of collaborative tools in achieving graduate student academic goals.

Table 1

Top 5 Frequency of Use: Web Resources and Tools

Web Resource or Tool	Always Use/ Use Fre- quently	Total	Use Occasion- ally	Total	Don’t use but plan	Total	Don’t Use	Total	Grand Total
1. File-sharing tools	73.63%	631	19.02%	163	2.68%	23	4.67%	40	857
2. Telecommunications (video) Applications	65.74%	564	23.19%	199	2.80%	24	8.28%	71	858
3. Video-sharing	44.69%	383	33.37%	286	4.55%	39	17.39%	149	857
4. Instant Messaging	36.34%	310	25.56%	218	3.87%	33	34.23%	292	853
5. Data Analysis Applications	29.29%	250	19.32%	165	11.36%	97	40.05%	342	854

Research Question Two

The focus of the second research question was on program modality types and the relationship to the frequency of use with Web resources and tools. A one-way ANOVA was utilized to analyze between groups to compare the use frequency of resources and tools with participants in face-to-face, mixed mode, and fully online programs. The results showed a significant difference in frequency of use for type of program mode at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 857) = 8.85, p = 0.000157$] (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). A Tukey HSD post hoc comparison test was then conducted, and the mean score for use frequency in face-to-face programs was significantly different than the frequency of use in online programs (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). This revealed that the use of Web resources and tools to support academics was higher among students in face-to-face programs compared to the participants in online programs. The face-to-face participants identified using Web resources and tools with a higher frequency than participants in online programs.

Research Question 3

The focus of research question three was regarding the perceptions of usefulness for the Web resources and tools identified on the survey. Table 2 is a summary of the top five Web resources and tools identified as being used most frequently by the participants (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). The top Web resources and tools perceived as the most useful were consistent with the most frequently used, with the same identified top four categories. The rating categories were broken out into five categories on the survey but consolidated in Table 2 to summarize.

Table 2

Top 5 Perceptions of Usefulness: Top Five Web Resources and Tools

Web Resource or Tool	Very Useful/ Somewhat Useful	Total	Not Very Useful/Not Useful at All	Total	Not Familiar With Resource or Tool	Total	Grand Total
1. File-sharing tools	92.42%	755	4.04%	33	3.55%	29	817
2. Telecommunications (video)Applications	89.93%	732	6.51%	53	3.56%	29	814
3. Video-sharing	76.86%	628	17.50%	143	5.63%	46	817
4. Instant Messaging	58.45%	477	32.97%	269	8.58%	70	816
5. Wikis	54.48%	444	35.58%	290	9.94%	81	815

Research Question Four

Research question number four focused on how students were using the Web resources and tools that they perceive as useful. The responses identified 169 specific types of Web tools, resources, and resource/tool categories, with 17 items identified ten or more times (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). The top five Web resources and tools are shown in Table 3. The top four resources and

tools are consistent with the data collected regarding the most used Web resources and tools and also that were perceived most useful.

Table 3

Top Five Identified Web Resources, Tools, and Resource/Tool Categories

Web Resources, Tools, and Resource/Tool Categories	Total
Zoom	122
Google Docs	108
YouTube	76
Google Drive	44
UCF Library Online	44

Participants were asked to identify ways that they were using the Web resources and tools supporting their academic goals. Four main usage group themes were revealed in the qualitative data review. Course work support was referenced in the responses most often, collaboration was the second most referenced theme, then research support, and finally cloud based support (Grieneisen Tillotson, 2020). Some responses identified multiple uses, such as for classwork support and collaboration with classmates.

Conclusion

The focus of this research study was to investigate graduate student use and perceptions of Web resources and tools to identify which resources were playing the biggest role in the support of their academic work, research, and academic goals. Data analysis revealed that file-sharing tools and telecommunications applications were utilized most frequently of the resources and tools categories on the survey. These were also the same resources and tools perceived as the most useful in academic support. These results also parallel the qualitative data, were the participants identified Zoom and Google Docs most often as beneficial in supporting academic goals. In the qualitative data, participants identified that they were most often using Web resources and tools for course work support, and additional usages were for collaboration, research support, and cloud support.

Future research studies may aid in further understanding of how Web resources and tools support students with their course work, research, and academic goals. Research examining the importance of Web resources and tools, attitudes toward these tools, and how Web resources and tools affect persistence attitudes are a few examples of studies that could provide further insight to this area of study. Additional information on this topic could assist in guiding effective graduate student professional development opportunities and expanded access to beneficial support.

Future research regarding Web tools and resources use between students in face-to-face programs versus students in online programs could be beneficial in understanding why differences may be present. The results in this study were unexpected, that participants in face-

to-face programs reported using Web resources and tools at a higher frequency than participants in online programs. While it is possible that changes in course mode and academic structures during COVID may have influenced participant responses, further research could help to provide additional insight into how Web resources and tools frequency of use varies among these groups.

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Reflexivity as a Catalyst to Transformational Learning: Creating Professionals for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous Environments

Ruth Wylie & Robin McLaughlin

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to introduce reflexivity as an essential process in andragogy, transformational learning, and adult development. Adult students face increased demands in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. This increased demand requires educator praxis, informed by the literature, to include supporting developmental complexification through reflexive processes that enable one to consider the very lens through which meaning is being made. Being a lifelong learner of content is no longer sufficient. In today's world one may need to regularly assess the very structures of meaning-making in context to the environmental demands.

Key Words: transformative learning, reflexivity, vertical development, VUCA

To prepare adult students to meet the challenges of today and the future requires continued improvement of theories and practices. Today, transformational learning theory is fully embraced in the literature and practices that results in change; however, continued development of the theory may benefit from further study asking: What is transformed? and How education may promote transformation? (DeSapio, 2017). Exploring these questions may benefit from first looking at the demands required of individuals and leaders in today's environment.

Educating for Today and the Future

Today's social and organizational contexts continue to evolve beyond the industrial age and the knowledge economy, but education continues to pursue improvements grounded in a scientific view of linear cause and effect characteristic of earlier contexts. Employers recognize today's context as a dynamic and inter-connected world that requires from individuals not only different skills and habits but the ability to change as their context continues to evolve (Developmental Dimensions, Inc., 2021). A different scientific view, that of complexity, may help educators identify new opportunities for improving learning theories and practices in today's context.

Complexity Lenses

Looking from a complexity science view provides five lenses for understanding the dynamic context of today and the future. An initial complexity lens of discontinuity makes visible how amplification of small changes can lead to large, disruptive events. Sudden changes with only limited warning often have significant impact and highlight the risks of contagion. Recognizing the natural *volatility* of a context contributes to its sustainability. The nature of the interlinkages

in a system can affect the resilience or the fragility of the system. When analyzing the world through a second complexity lens of causality, we see patterns of coherence (or incoherence) which are not reducible to events but rather best understood in terms of relationships or interactions. The more diverse the elements in these patterns, the more unpredictable the context is. Unpredictability and the lack the data to make predictions or decisions generates *uncertainty*. A third complexity lens of networks reveals the importance of the web of individual or organizational actors in an ecosystem. Issues may be associated with conflict or cooperation based on the networked meaning-making between actors and their histories. This relational *complexity* cannot be understood through understanding individuals or organization alone. A fourth complexity lens of the observer effect discloses the importance of perspective in making sense of our context. Recognizing problems and data can be interpreted in a variety of ways raises the challenge of *ambiguity*. Tolerating ambiguity or capitalizing on the differences in perspective to re-frame experiences can lead to innovation based on new meaning and behaviors. A fifth complexity lens of *emergence* can also sharpen our view of how change occurs. New phenomena can emerge when sufficient scale of nested relationships come together. Such new phenomena, or novelty, may require new language and behaviors and creativity for meaning making and responding in this context. These complexity lenses give a way of analyzing the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) context of today and the future for which learners and leaders need to be prepared (Boston & Ellis, 2019).

Competence and Capability in a VUCA World

The linear thinking appropriate for a stable, predictable, non-complex world may not identify requirements for today's individuals and leaders. The complexity lenses of the VUCA world suggest that educators need to develop capabilities for dynamic change versus competencies focused on knowledge and skills alone (MDV Consulting, 2019).

Organizational researchers and consultants identified some of the capabilities required for complex environments. Antonacopoulou (2018) explicates “the need for *Courage, Commitment, Confidence* and *Curiosity* as integral to VUCA learning. VUCA Learning Leadership promotes: learning to feel safe being *Vulnerable*; learning to remain *Unnerved* learning to demonstrate *Candour* and learning to experience *Awakening*. These dimensions form an extension of earlier focus in organisational and management learning” (p. 2). Vessey and his colleagues developed a model in which personal, interpersonal, and cognitive capacities provide the foundations for promoting inquiry, surfacing dilemmas, nudging systems, connecting creatively, and cultivating resilience as VUCA capabilities (MDV Research and Innovation Alliance, 2017). Others acknowledge the need additional capabilities such as open systems thinking (recognizing multiple causation); foresight, not just hindsight (recognizing weak signals and patterns); collaboration and integration (recognizing benefits of diversity); agency and self-authorship in decision-making (recognizing the role of judgement); and paradox and polarity management (recognizing holding multiple perspectives concurrently). Boston and Ellis (2019) identify four capacities: sense-making, perspective-shifting, self-relating, and opposable thinking and four levels of cognitive complexity and development. Capabilities for complex environments, however, require as Boston and Ellis say, “upgrades of one’s operating system” (p. 20) across those four levels. The

development of these capabilities is informed by the individual and leader making meaning through their cognitive complexity lens (Berger, 2004, 2011).

Transformative versus Transformational Learning

One's cognitive complexity, a developmental concept, is the operating system of making meaning. From this domain perspective, a change in the complexity of one's meaning-making is characterized as transformational while a reorganization of meaning-making is characterized as transformative. Mezirow (2000) indicates that one's assumptions form a habit of mind and combine with one's points of view to inform one's "frame of reference." (p. 17). Through reflection on experience, a new understanding may be obtained through the "reordering" of "paradigmatic assumptions." (p. 140). Mezirow's concept of *transformative* learning seems to suggest that what transforms is the relationship between existing content.

In Kegan's (2000) terms, *transformational* learning occurs when one's relationship to the form or structures of meaning-making becomes visible and therefore the structure itself can be examined objectively. For example, one's value or belief may inform a *reflection* on an experience, yet this may be content of mind, or habit of mind, influencing content of experience. If instead one reflexively makes one's thinking the object of examination, there may be a complexification in the lens of meaning-making. This distinction between the transformative and the transformational is made clearer by understanding adult learning in context to adult development.

Adult Learning in Context to Adult Development

The psychological perspective of adult development grew out of Piaget's (1966) constructivist theory and Baldwin's work in cognitive growth constructed through iterative steps or *circular reaction with variations* (Broughton & Freeman-Moir, 1982). Considering adult learning in context to adult development allows a distinction between more information (horizontal growth) and a more complex relationship to that information (vertical growth). Brown's (2012) differentiation between vertical and horizontal learning, and Kegan's (2000) differentiation between informational and transformational learning, are important distinctions to explore.

Horizontal Learning and Vertical Development. Horizontal learning expands what one knows and strengthens one's technical expertise, functional knowledge, skills, and behaviors. This type of learning, which include reflection, is useful for solving clearly defined problems, or technical challenges typical of non-complex environments (Kegan, 1994; Schön, 1983). In contrast, vertical development, which involves developing a more complex relationship to the information through reflexivity, changes the lens or structure through which one thinks and makes meaning, enabling one to engage more complex problems or adaptive challenges (Kegan, 1994). While both the horizontal and vertical inform adult learning, it is an increase in complexity (vertical) that shifts one's perspectives and changes one's understanding and meaning made of the experience (Kegan, 1982).

Kegan's constructive-developmental theory explains the evolution in the complexity of one's meaning-making. Kegan considers ontology through a complexification of epistemology. For Kegan,

There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it *becomes* a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception, because we *are* the meaning-making context. (Kegan, 1982, p. 11 italics in original).

For Kegan, the changing subject-object relationship defines developmental growth. Aspects of experience, such as thoughts, behaviors, and emotions, become object when one can take a third-person perspective. Until this change in one's epistemology occurs, one is subject to, unaware of, the lens being looked through (Kegan, 1982, 1994).

In this context, first-person and third-person perspectives can be understood as gaining greater psychological distance from the content. This relational change supports the evolution of complexity and answers the question what is transformed: *Complexity is transformed*. In stage development, the principle of evolution is the same regardless of the specific line of development such as moral, ego, or cognition. Iterative transformation occurs through transcending and including the previous stages. Our VUCA world demands greater complexity than the industrial age or knowledge economy. The complexity of one's meaning-making system shapes and influences their understanding of experiences, behaviors, thinking, and feeling. If the student's cognitive complexity is the focus of growth, then how do we as educators support this vertical development?

Learning from Experience

Experiential learning may occur in the horizontal or vertical context. While both the horizontal and vertical inform adult learning, it is an increase in complexity (vertical development) that may change one's cognitive structure for understanding and meaning made of the experience (Kegan, 1982). Reflection allows new understanding to emerge through a *reordering* of one's current ontology, that is existing values, beliefs, principles, assumptions, and positions. Reflexivity may allow a more complex structure of meaning-making to emerge because it can enable one to objectively examine one's meta-cognition and epistemology.

Reflective Learning

Dewey (2011) suggests that we do not learn from practice or experience alone. Learning requires reflection on our experience(s). Reflection, for Dewey, is more than 'thinking about' an experience, it is a systematic, disciplined way of thinking in which one makes meaning based on the experience in relation to current knowledge and beliefs. The outcome of reflection develops new understanding for future actions. The process which recurs in forward-moving spirals is the essence of growth, bridging practice and theory. Reflection is the central process of education defined as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases [one's] ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (Dewey, 2011, p. 59).

The reflection as a learning process closely mirrors the process of scientific inquiry. The process begins with awareness of the current situation. This **presence to experience** requires curiosity and an open mind to opportunity through inquiry. Seeing the full complexity of experience contributes to the opportunity to learn from it. Therefore, to learn from reflection, we need to **describe the whole experience**, seeing it as a system from a “balcony view.” **Analysis of experience** prepares one to ask useful questions which trigger the search for additional knowledge and data/facts. Dewey (2011) stresses that reflection must lead to action as described in Kolb’s (2014) phase of ‘active experimentation’ in which intentional responses based on reasoned judgment permit the validity of the new learning for a continuous spiral of growth.

Reflective learning involves first person thinking about, and sensemaking of, an experience. From a first-person perspective, the learner is using one’s own thinking patterns and habits to understand the experience. Acknowledging the value of a complexity lens, learning from experiences benefits from the drawing on different lenses from our current view. Only when we explore and change the cognitive complexity of our lens are we developing our capabilities.

Reflexive Learning

Current approaches to adult education may rely too heavily on reflection alone. Reflection is a foundational process necessary for learning. Reflective learning results in a reordering of content and comes from a current lens associated with a plateau or stage of development. **Reflexivity is distinct from reflection.** A more complex understanding emerges from the disruption of the current meaning-making lens. Reflexivity creates a dissonance and challenge that disrupts the stable state of the plateau allowing us to climb to a more complex structure of meaning making. The reflexive process is disruptive because it allows one to see the lens through which one has been making meaning. Having established a new lens, all experience may hold new meaning and understanding.

The process of reflexivity involves engaging in a third-person dialogue with one’s thinking (Brownlee et al., 2017). Reflexivity allows one to use the reflective content to challenge and question the existing patterns of thinking such as one’s values, beliefs, ideology, assumptions, and positions. One explores their thinking and questions the elements, patterns, and origins of thoughts from an objective third-person perspective. This objective perspective, on one’s meta-cognition and epistemology, provides a distance and awareness that may enable one to intentionally choose their meaning-making lens. Intentionally choosing the meaning-making lens improves one’s capability for adaptation and responding to VUCA environments. Reflexivity is transformational because it is disruptive.

Discussion and Conclusion

The importance of reflexivity cannot be overlooked as an essential learning process that must be included in further development of educational theory and practices. Reflexivity must be embedded in andragogical approaches such as problem-based learning, story-formed learning, and connectedness suggested by DeSapio (2017) as approaches that answer the *how* question of

transformational learning. Further suggestions for answering the *how* question focus on three primary conditions that support vertical development: Heat experiences—facing a complex situation that disrupts and disorients his habitual way of thinking; Colliding perspectives—exposing one to people with different worldviews, opinions, backgrounds, and training; and Elevated sensemaking—integrate and make sense of these perspectives and experiences from more elevated stages of development (Petrie, 2015). The effectiveness of these three conditions, however, will be directly related to the process of reflexivity using an objective lens.

For reflexivity to result in transformational learning one must first recognize and name the existing belief. Learners must notice and assess the implication of the belief and then consider discrepant evidence. An integral part of the reflexive process is to develop an understanding of the source and history of the belief. This step contributes to evaluating the continued relevance of the belief. Finally, creating small experiments based on a complexified epistemology permits one to see how experiences are different (Fitzgerald & Berger, 2002). Intentionally building reflexivity cycles in our teaching, mentoring and leadership development to support an adult learner's epistemology using the lenses of complexity can improve educational practices in developing individuals' and leaders' capabilities for today and the future.

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Save the Date—AHEA Conference 2022

Make plans now to join us next year. Hopefully, we'll be able to meet in person again. If so, we'll likely be back in Orlando, in March. If in-person gatherings still aren't advisable, we'll meet again online. Next year, we will be releasing two titles in the AHEA Book Series: *Advancing the Global Agenda for Human Rights, Vulnerable Populations, and Environmental Sustainability: Adult Education as Strategic Partner* and *Trauma in Adult and Higher Education: Conversations and Critical Reflections*. These books will shape the theme for our 2022 conference.

Begin thinking now about how your ideas might add to this discussion. The call for presentation proposals and details regarding the conference dates and location will be sent early in the fall.