Transformational Learning Theory

General

Transformational learning theory is a humanist learning theory introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1981[1]. This theory does not address general aspects of learning, but rather **transformational learning** in adults: the learning that **strongly influences learner**, his **beliefs** and **values**. This kind of learning results in "*new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world.*"[2]

What is transformational learning theory?

In 1981 Mezirow introduced the concept of **meaning perspectives**, which represent one's complete view on the world. Meaning perspectives are generated by a number of **meaning schemata**, each of which contains specific knowledge and values. Meaning perspectives are acquired passively until early adulthood and are later modified through transformational learning.

These changes often come due to life experiences, often related to strong emotional responses. These may be personal crises like divorce, death of a friend or a family member, wars, natural or man-caused disasters, health crises, etc. What differs transformational learning from classical learning is the initial inability to fit the new material into the existing frames of schemata, what results in a need to change them. These-like experiences are also called *perspective transformations*.

In the classroom, commonly three types of experience can result in transformational learning:

- **experience**,
- **critical reflection**, and
- **rational discourse**.

Usually these follow one after another: a strong emotional experience fosters critical reflection and analysis of similar past experiences, which will, when discussed with others with different or similar points of view, result in new conclusions and a perspective transformation.

What is the practical meaning of transformational learning theory?

Different authors suggested different roles of students and teachers during the transformational learning. The role of the students is mostly to take responsibility for their learning and creating a pleasant environment, and suggestions to the teachers generally refer to

- creating a **safe environment** facilitating relationships characterized by **trust** and **care**,
- **understanding why** they want to encourage a change in students and not only how and which change,
- assisting in the development of the **critical reflection** in students,
- taking into consideration and talking about students' feelings,

- enabling their students to apply the new insights outside the classroom,
- helping others by sharing his experiences, and
- being a **role-model** displaying his own willingness to change and learn.

Keywords and most important names

- **transformative learning theory**, **adult learning**, **meaning perspectives**, **meaning schemata**, **perspective transformations**, **experience**, **critical reflection**, **rational discourse**
- Jack Mezirow

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Read more

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[1]
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[2]
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