

## EDITORIAL PREFACE

# Special Issue on Transformative Learning

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I have a special interest in adult vocational education, as I taught at the University of New Brunswick in a program for tradespersons who were making the transition into becoming teachers of their trades. I was a part of this program for about 25 years until it was moved out of the university and into a department in the provincial government. My students were, for example, practicing electricians, plumbers, auto mechanics, marine mechanics, hospitality workers, carpenters, and welders, who were becoming teachers of their trade. I also have a personal history with the trades—my brothers are both auto mechanics, my son was a welder, my brother-in-law is a big truck mechanic, and my father was a farmer, which involves being a master of many trades. I have lived long in this world.

I have also lived long in the world of transformative learning. When Mezirow's (1991) first book on transformative learning was published, I was a professor of adult education at Brock University in Ontario. My graduate students and I spent many hours debating the meaning of transformative learning theory. We were fortunate to be able to invite Jack Mezirow to our university to speak to faculty

and lead graduate student workshops. At that time, I already had begun to write my book on transformative learning, with an emphasis on the practicalities of fostering transformative learning, so I was delighted to have the opportunity to discuss my ideas with Jack Mezirow.

I spent the next three decades studying, doing research, and writing about transformative learning. Needless to say, transformative learning remains a primary interest for me. So, when Dr. Victor Wang, Editor in Chief of the *IJAVET*, asked me if I would be interested in editing a special issue on transformative learning, I was excited about pursuing this. It has been a fascinating journey.

### **In This Issue**

The first article, by Yolanda Neives, focuses on the transformative learning experiences of adult Latino students enrolled in a community college developmental reading class. The students keep dialogue journals and the educator/researcher “talks back” to the learners through that medium. The research is framed with Mezirow's transformative learning theory, Brookfield's

descriptions of critical thinking, and my own ideas about individuation as transformative learning. The quotes from participants in this article are moving and informative.

The second article, by Laurence Robert Cohen, is about the author's and the students' experiences in a vocational education classroom where the students were learning to write resumes. Laurence does not deal with the "nuts and bolts" of resume writing, but rather he calls upon his students to critically reflect on the meaning and structure of their work history and, in the process, examine habits of mind and meaning perspectives which have previously defined them. In this way, the course becomes a transformative learning experience. Students often experience a revised sense of identity, become more confident, and see a way to succeed in a new career path.

Anthony Adkisson and Catherine Monaghan, in the third article, focus on underserved adult learners entering vocational education programs. They suggest that educational institutions and programs historically operate from a Eurocentric framework of learning, which is ingrained with the cultural values of individuality, autonomy, and independence. They argue that within the larger context of an educational institution, programs and coursework may also be counter to the ways of learning and knowing for many of the underserved adult learners entering into classes. Adult educators working with these underserved learners need to understand that they may operate from a cultural orientation that may differ from the expectation of the educational institution.

In the fourth article in this issue, Niels Agger-Gupta and Catherine Etmanski explore the Master's of Arts in Leadership Studies (MA-L) program at Royal Roads University in British Columbia, Canada. They suggest that there are at least three elements of the design of this program that contribute to experiences of transformation: the program creates a framework that allows learners to *learn how to learn*; the program has its own competency framework that begins by priming learners to

look inward before they seek to lead others; and the first year two-week residency, completed after one month of online preparation, provides an embodied experience in what, for many, is a new way of *being*. The authors propose that this framework creates a transformative experience for mid-career professionals.

Michael McVey, in the fifth article, reports on a pilot study for his research on how to train faculty to teach in an online environment. He is interested in how individual instructors' perceived learning style can be incorporated in such a program to foster competence in teaching online. Perhaps most interesting, his study also analyzes faculty resistance to distance education and how transformative learning theory may play a role in overcoming this resistance.

Finally, Leah Moss and Andy Brown contribute the sixth article for this special issue. They write about the Recognition of Acquired Competencies (RAC) as it is known in Quebec, Canada, or Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). This process requires learners to engage in retrospective thought about their learning path, their learning style and their experiential knowledge. It is a process of critical self-reflection and rigorous analysis by the learner of their prior learning, and it is often their first exposure to the examination of their own knowledge. The article provides case studies of immigrant learners from the Montreal, Quebec area as they recognize and analyze their competencies in vocational education. Through the analysis of interviews with learners, the authors suggest transformative learning is a by-product of this process.

## Looking Forward

It is my hope that the articles in this special issue will inspire others to consider the role of transformative learning in adult vocational education in their practice and in their research. In the literature, writers tend to describe vocational education as being "technical" in nature; that is, mainly concerned with concrete skills and factual knowledge. But I propose that such a point of view is limiting and constraining. I

think of the welder in my class who created a sculpture (using welding) to represent his understanding of teaching welding; I think of the auto mechanic who took our whole class out to change tires in the university parking lot; and I think of the drawings that students made to represent the paradigms of learning

and posted them around our classroom. Let us all look for ways to make vocational education transformative.

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