

Teachers as Adult Learners: their need to Transform

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Abstract

In today's school, it is no longer the abundance of knowledge that matters, but the methods of acquiring it, the cultivation of skills, and the preparation of students to become active citizens and not just observers. The rapidly changing social environment and lately the Pandemic, have further elevated the role of education by introducing, if not "mandating", lifelong learning for the overwhelmed teachers. Considering the importance and criticality of the school's mission, the importance of the teacher's duties and the challenge in the implementation of their work can easily be seen. In this article, we will briefly explore three of the most basic theories of adult education and significant aspects of constructivism, whose tenets also undergird, teachers' continuous and imperative need of adults' lifelong learning. The theories discussed are the Andragogy of Knowles, Freire's educational Social Change, and Mezirow's Transformation Theory, as a resource for deepening our understanding of the critical matters affecting the need for new ways for teachers to approach their learning and teaching.

Keywords: Teacher learning, adult learning theories, dialogue

1. Introduction

As Brookfield (1985) points out, adult learning aims to transform society by enhancing individual knowledge and skills. His view of the relationship between adult education and society, however, is somewhat instrumental and narrow. This article reinforces a view of adult education that is, instead, community-based, and that aims at two interdependent goals: The first is that of personal knowledge and skill acquisition; the second is that of progress and community empowerment (Connolly, 2005). Adult learning within a community education system requires that individuals remain consciously intentional toward social change while preconditioning readiness to renegotiate some of the traditional roles of the educational process.

A philosophical community is a phenomenon that comes from antiquity but continues to flourish today and could be considered community education. Looking back to the origins of philosophy in Greece in the fifth century BC Greece, the ancient Greek philosophers—particularly the Stoics, Epicureans, and Skeptics—clearly thought of philosophy as a form of therapy, that cured the toxic false beliefs that cause suffering (Kokkos et al. 2019). Similarly, Socrates suggested philosophy as a way of life, for better understanding, elaborating, and managing one's emotions and self, while learning through dialogue. Philosophers in the ancient world lived in philosophical communities of shared values and shared practices where they learned how to examine their beliefs through dialogue (Kokkos et al. 2019) and conversation.

While modern professional development and training are often held in a classroom, community education can occur in many different venues that learners find familiar and non-intimidating. Unlike the situation in typical, hierarchical classroom dynamics, the role of the adult education facilitator in community education is reciprocal—as an equal to the adult learner—where, in as much as possible, authority is transferred to the interlocutors while the educator themselves becomes a collaborative learner. In sum, teachers would work in cooperation and in solidarity with one another as co-learners, co-producers of academic empowerment and well-being for their students. Moreover, these communities can flourish through informal education, often outside the purview of the state, universities, and other formal adult education providers.

2. Selected Adult Learning Theories and Frameworks

2.1 From Dewey to Knowles: Andragogy and Self-Directed Learning

As with many concepts in education, the genesis of adult learning can well be attributed to John Dewey, who focused primarily on the empirical (practical or experiential) discovery of knowledge by the student. And who, although mainly concerned with the education of children, is nevertheless considered one of the major theorists of continuing education. This is because his theory linked schooling to continuing education in an inseparable continuum (Dewey, 1926, 1933, 1956). Dewey considered education to be a key element of human development, which, however, is not limited to the basic, school education of children and adolescents, but can continue at any stage of a person's life. In his fundamental work "Experience and Education" (1969) he claims that every human being can be in a continuous process of development, which is based on their continuing education as long as the basic education they have received has set the appropriate grounds. Dewey's views became a central point of reference and deeply influenced the founders of adult education such as Edouard Lindeman, Carl Rogers, Malcolm Knowles, Jack Mezirow, and Kurt Lewin (Kokkos, 2005). David Kolb has also evolved a theory on the experiential role of adult learners according to Cranton (2016). However, in the last half of the 20th century, the concept was more directly promoted by Rogers who, as a psychotherapist, behaved more as a layperson than as a recognized authority. However, this set of principles was developed in the context of adult education mainly by Knowles who describes adult learners among others, as being self-directed and as those who "voluntarily enter an educational activity with a life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning driven by intrinsic motivation" (Galbraith, 2004, p.23). Knowles (1973, 1989, 1998) turned Rogers' "self-guidance" (2001) into a key element of his approach to adult education, even adopting the forgotten 19th-century German term, "Andragogy" (anc. Greek: guide/teaching adults), which he claimed stood separately differentiated from pedagogy (guide/teaching children) and that is how he tried to describe it to educators. His theory came gradually to the following conclusions, which he found foundational for organizing adults programs (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 85):

- Adults need to know why they are learning something.
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for learning activities
- They need to treat learning objects as problems that seek solutions.
- They learn best when the subject is of interest to them.
- The reason for teaching these topics must be explained.
- Teaching should be focused on practical application and not on simple memorization.
- Teaching should take into account the diversity of students' characters and backgrounds.
- Since they are self-guided, teaching should allow them to discover things for themselves.
- They need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of teaching.
- They are more interested in issues directly related to their work or personal life.

One of its consequences has been Allen Tough's (1971, 1982) work on Adult Learning Projects, who considered SDL as "occurring mostly outside formal education and generating major concerns about the role of the adult's educator in promoting and sustained learning how to learn, and life-long learning in every-day life" (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p.137). His work generated numerous research studies around the globe (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, p.138) that also confirmed the "prevalence" of SDL in adults' lives, without, as Brookfield criticizes (1985, 2005), differentiating the significance of the various kinds of learning.

Even though, the intention of the article is to apply brief descriptions of the selected theories, it is nevertheless, significant to acknowledge the three main goals for SDL that Merriam describes:

1. To enhance the ability of learners to be self-determined in their studies, and their ability to plan, carry out, and evaluate their own learning. (. . . not all learners are automatically self-directed merely by virtue of being adults, or even easily trained to become . . . Sometimes they are asked to change the way they know and understand the world . . . and transition to higher stages of development... (Kegan, 2018 as cited in Merriam, 2020, p.141)
2. To foster transformational learning. (“... critical reflection and self-awareness on one’s own learning” (Mezirow, 1985 as cited in Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020, 142)
3. To promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of SDL (... critically reflecting on themselves, and social, economic, and political context in a cooperative learning environment. (Merriam et al. 2006, p. 121).

2.2 Paulo Freire and the Theory of Social Change

Paulo Freire (1970), the great Brazilian adult educator, formulated a learning theory that he referred to as “self-awareness.” It was based on his experience as a trainer of impoverished groups in Brazil and a leader of liberation efforts in Latin America and Africa, and Freire is now very popular as a theorist and partitioner throughout the Western world. He believed that adult education aims to develop critical awareness among individuals and groups in parallel with their educational endeavors. His work was inspired by the desire for political liberation and the removal of oppression. Critical awareness refers to a process in which students develop the ability to analyze, ask questions, and take action on the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives. According to Henderson and Mapp (2002), it sees Mezirow’s disorienting dilemma is a transformative learning experience.

Freire proposed an important distinction between the school process and education. He considered the school process as a mode of social control, while education is characterized by the possibility of transforming society—considering the “learner as an active subject for both individual and social transformation” (McLaren, 2003, pp. 191-2).

It is obvious that Freire (1984) perceives the educational process in relation to the influence of the existing power structure as a process of confrontation and conflict of interests. He argues that various kinds of power use education to reproduce the oppressive ideologies that prevail in the space-time environment at the expense of the popular masses and against which the educator must take a stand.

Emanating from Freirean empowering education is a critical-democratic pedagogy focused on interaction and active intervention. It approaches the development of the individual as an active, collaborative, and social process enabled by the inherent interdependence of the individual in society. McLaren describes the pedagogy of empowerment as the process by which students learn to critically approach knowledge and aim to broaden their understanding of themselves, the society in which they live and beyond, and, ultimately, its possible transformational cultural lifestyle (Shor, 1992).

Freirean dialogue nurtures love, humility, hope, faith, trust, and critical thinking/contemplation (1976), and “is directed from action to thought and, from there to new action” (Perry, 2000, p.17).

In addition, Freire developed a model of literacy, based on the evolution of the cultural circles of the Popular Education movement, which flourished in Brazil in the 1950s (Freire, 1972). In Freire’s methodology of Dialogical Problem-Posing, where knowledge is sought collectively through dialogue and critical thinking and is not transmitted, and follows three interrelated stages, very similar to the ones developed in Community-based learning:

- a) Discovering the “generating themes”,
- b) Codification, and
- c) Reflection.

The first stage is when a problem that derives from students' context and concerns is posed for inquiry. Learners then begin Codifying and Decodifying their prior experiences and knowledge and consequently, new knowledge is acquired. "Students' critical awareness of existing problems leads", according to Freire (1974, p.46-54), "to critical conscientization which ultimately empowers them". The third stage, that of Reflection, coincides with social action. Freire considered this stage as the best way to maintain meaningful communication. Through the completion of the three stages, learners can achieve awareness, that is, they can then understand how their view of the world and their place in it was formed by social and historical powers that operate at their expense (Freire, 1972). The novelty of Freire's theory lies in the belief that adult learners, once they realize the conditions in which they live, will act with the aim of social change by overthrowing the existing order. Freire believed that the goal of learning is to lead individuals to emancipation and consequently to the change of social structures (Freire, 1973). Freire's theory, despite the criticism it has received, has influenced many contemporary scholars of adult education such as Mezirow and Jarvis, who also believe that education should lead to emancipation (Freire, 1998).

2.3 Mezirow's Transformative Learning

When studying Transformative Learning theory (TL) one would find that in the related streams of adult learning there is a concomitant plethora of perspectives that span a very broad range of foci in social-science research: "rational vs. extra-rational processes, the individual vs. social change, autonomous vs. relational learning, and many others . . ." (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p.3) with similar outcomes in learning. It is, however, a continually evolving adult learning theory in the complex field of adult education that allows educators to inspire their diverse learners through their self-directed learning paths toward and to transformation. Following is a brief report of the theory and its progenitor—intentionally minimal.

Beginning in the last 2 decades of the 20th Century Jack Mezirow contributed to the complicated domain of Adult Education, the theory of Transformative Learning that offered both the educator and the learner who follow its precepts the opportunity—and challenge—of profoundly revising the way they see and make meaning of the world. This is through a process of serially correcting now dysfunctional assumptions that were acquired, often unconsciously, in earlier years so that they are replaced by ones that are more open, permeable, and in harmony with the operational reality in which the person lives. Within its lens, "learning may be defined as the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience, which guides subsequent understanding, appreciation, and action, what we perceive and fail to perceive, and what we think and fail to think, that earlier were powerfully influenced by ingrained habits of expectation that constitute our frame of reference—a set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences" (Mezirow, 1991, p.11).

With his theory, Mezirow specifically seeks to explain when learning becomes transformational and what precisely it is that changes as transformation occurs. The trigger for the formation and evolution of Mezirow's theory initially was observing the stresses, his wife Edee, experienced when participating in the learning process as an adult reentering college after raising a son. This experience sparked more extensive research on American women who return to and are actively involved in learning after earlier "occupations," raising children, pursuing a career, etc. Mezirow's early thinking was influenced strongly by the writings of German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Habermas (1990), in whose theories, he grounded his theory of transformative learning—drawing on, and then repurposing, the German Philosopher's three kinds of knowledge/learning—instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory—as well as his precepts for reflective discourse and communicative action.

Mezirow defined transformative learning as a process of reflective transformation in a specific frame of reference in which "all of a person's mental habits are challenged and subject for possible revision so as not to be a hindrance to the evolution of life" (1991, p. 196). Based on this logic, he considered it necessary for the learner to reflect and then redefine and transform the personal perceptions which

have been adopted through experience. More specifically, Mezirow stated that “transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform given mental sets to make them more inclusive, diverse, open, emotionally ready for change through critical reflection, in order to generate beliefs and perceptions and to proceed for action based on the new perception that has emerged” (2003b, p. 58-59, 2007b, p. 47). Furthermore, “Transformational learning” is a term that describes a learning process in which “one critically realizes one’s own established positions and assumptions as well as those of others and then evaluates their relevance in order to construct an interpretation.” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4).

As a frame of reference, Mezirow defines “the cultural, ethical, philosophical, and linguistic structures through which we give meaning by giving coherence and importance to our experiences” (2009, p. 128). He sees two aspects—the mental habits and the assumptions that derive from them. Mental habits have been defined as the specific way in which a person thinks, feels, and acts influenced by the above-mentioned structures, which are structural elements of a person’s personality and change with much greater difficulty from the previous perceptions and assumptions that are, themselves, comprised of clusters of beliefs, feelings, judgments, and consequent behaviors (Mezirow, 1991, 2007b). They are among the principal components of TL theory, and identified as precisely what needs to change for transformational learning to occur.

The next element, similarly essential for the theory, is what Mezirow bequeathed to the next generations as the ground elements of critical reflection, the critical perception that a person has of him/herself (critical self-reflection) and rational, dialogue-discourse. These two, critical reflection and rational dialogue, have been placed at the center of Mezirow’s theory (1990, 1991) and are perhaps the most important conditions contributing to the process of transformational learning.

I acknowledge that Mezirow was not the first to refer to critical reflection as a significant element in adult education. We know that some references to it are found even in the works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (Kokkos, 2010, 2019). In modern times, Dewey used this term and separated it simply from critical reflection. Only much later, Mezirow presented the correlation of critical reflection with transformative learning in his work “Critical Reflection” (1998). Specifically, he stated in detail that with critical reflection we do not just look back at experiences, events, attitudes, and emotions, but proceed to a critical evaluation of them (1998). In this way, critical reflection becomes the means for reexamining, understanding, controlling, and redefining past experiences. Through this process “the individual tries to recognize, evaluate, and reshape any problematic attitudes or views held in relation to the content, the process, and the premise of previous knowledge” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 107-108).

2.3.1 Rational Dialogue

Along with critical reflection, an equally fundamental element of TL theory, is discourse as rational dialogue in the process by which “two or more mature, critically minded individuals, converse for the purpose of arriving at a common understanding through a critical examination of subjective experiences in matters of common interest” (Mezirow, 2007, p. 50). The process proceeds without the disapproval or rejection of opposing views but, rather, with the smooth integration of diversity through the process of communication and presentation of ideas, assumptions, and logical arguments by the participants in order to analyze experiences in the most democratic way (Mezirow, 2007b). Through such discourse, a person develops emotionally, learns to express his/her experiences, comes to understand them, and gradually arrives at self-directed learning and autonomy (Mezirow, 1997). A major and catalytic role in a learner’s achieving rational dialogue is held by the instructor, who must inspire trainees to participate critically in dialogue and formulate sound arguments so as to get closer to the transformation of their assumptions (Mezirow, 1997) thus freeing themselves from dysfunctional behaviors as well as outdated views and perceptions.

A prerequisite for such a dialogue is a climate of trust, equality, solidarity, and freedom that the trainer must create with trainees. A context that can similarly make people thrive is an additional attribute—emotional intelligence—mentioned later by the American thinker, Daniel Goleman (1998) as

facilitating the smooth and successful conduct of dialogue through the agency of which the individual becomes emotionally more mature as he/she perceives and manages his/her own emotions, can understand the feelings of others, detects personal motivations, and regulates interpersonal relationships with pure and clear thinking.

It is also important to note that Mezirow separates learning into instrumental and transformative types—instrumental simply being learning that is not transformative. The first refers to the learning of children whom Mezirow (1991, p. 3) holds “cannot engage in learning that is transformative until they become adults”. In sum, he holds the view that, in childhood, learning comes from authorities, while adult learners have already over time formed assumptions, habits, and attitudes, and, in some cases, can feel the urgent need to acquire new perspectives in order to transform their problematic frameworks of reference and be able to interpret facts better for themselves.

2.3.2 Perspective Change and “Disorienting Dilemma”

At the heart of transformative learning theory is the process of “perspective change” which is defined in three dimensions: psychological (changes in self-understanding), ethics (revision of belief systems), and behavior (changes in lifestyle).

The change of perspective that leads to transformative learning usually arises after a so-called “disorienting dilemma”, which is activated after a dramatic unresolved episode in one’s life, a significant change, or a great loss—although it can also occur after the accumulation of changes in some established systems of ideas, over a period of time. Change of perspective can also occur due to much less dramatic circumstances, such as those created by an educator. At large, Mezirow sees transformational learning as a kind that transforms problematic frameworks and outdated assumptions, so that they become more inclusive, open, thoughtful, and emotionally ready for change (Kokkos, 2005). Mezirow described the process of personal perspective transformation, that capture the elements of the theory so far described briefly, in 10 “phases”: 1. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma, 2. Undergoing self-examination, 3. Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations, 4. Relating discontent to the similar experiences of others recognizing that the problem is shared, 5. Exploring options for new way of acting, 6. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles, 7. Planning a course of action, 8. Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action, 9. Trying our new roles and assessing them, 10. Reintegrating into society with a new perspective (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168-9).

The following example serves to illustrate the nature and potential transformative effect of a “disorienting dilemma”: A primary school teacher attends a postgraduate seminar, where the collaborative teaching method is taught. Having firm beliefs about the new method, he is primarily negative about innovation as he believes that conventional didactic practice has been tested by him and works well. However, the seminar is conducted by applying the new method and he participates in a group where he is assigned an important role, as a result of which his self-awareness is stimulated, and he performs exceptionally well. As he becomes the center of attention, he begins to wonder about the value of the new method in relation to the one he had used until now. He transfers his experience to his own classroom and realizes that his students learn better and more enjoyable. He decides to adopt the new method, thus transforming his older beliefs—and behavior.

In this example we observe an important part of transformational learning—enabling an adult learner – a teacher- to critically change their frame of reflection, consciously revise their assumptions and beliefs, and adopt a new attitude that will offer new ways of defining and operating in the world around them. This process is largely logical and analytical.

But while the learning process is certainly rational on some levels, it can also sometimes be a profound experience that can be described as a spiritual or emotional transformation. For example, trying to undo racist, sexist, and other oppressive attitudes and behaviors can be particularly painful, as these

attitudes are often developed as ways of understanding and successfully navigating a perverse social world. Transformational learning requires risk-taking, as well as a willingness to be vulnerable and to accept our perceptions and mentality being strongly challenged (Dirkx, 1998).

3. A Discussion of the Theories

Orbiting adult learning theories from the very past and then nibbling those parts that direct us researchers toward teachers' transformational learning for powerful teaching in the 21st century resonates with the selection of the above-mentioned theories.

Socrates' work was a cornerstone of adult education, as his applied pedagogical methods (dialectical, control, obstetrics-maieutic) revealed that spiritual exercise and education are not confined to a specific age but last for a lifetime. In this way, he engaged in a continuous struggle to educate the citizens in order to help them activate their critical ability to be led to self-knowledge (Kalfas, 2015). The dialogue—and more specifically the rational dialogue of Socrates—motivated adherents to acquire a permanent critical stance. Thus, rational dialogue and critical reflection have for many centuries been inextricably linked concepts and practices. The great differences in current adult education compared to the past have probably arisen because of the diverse aims that modern education adopted.

Many scholars have raised questions about andragogy as a “proven theory” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 98) and the “sustainability” of its assumptions (Merriam et al., 2006, p. 86). Knowles, (1989, p. 112) himself, was “skeptical” about this and therefore refers to andragogy only as a “conceptual framework or basis for an adult learning theory”. Furthermore, it seems clear that the focus of Knowles' understanding of self-direction in learning (SDL) emphasized learners' responsibility and freedom to construct their own learning experiences through a process (critical reflection, motivation, experiences), driven by the personal attributes of the learner (skills, abilities), and within a specific context (culture, political climate, learning environment) (1989). As Philip Candy takes note, it is this major distinction within the model of self-directed learning as a goal and as a method—that many researchers have examined for decades (1991)—that “complexifies” it evermore. Because, for some SDL, was construed as a process of organizing instruction, while, for others, it has been seen as a learning characteristic/personal quality for adult learners to embrace if they did not have it already. It was also considered a rejection of overly teacher-centered traditional methods, which very often did not show the slightest confidence in and respect for learners' ability to take responsibility for the way they learn. Knowles's definition of SDL continues to be the most widely cited: In its broadest meaning, “self-directed learning describes a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes” (1975, p. 18).

The next segment that connects this collection of theories is the basic demand of Freire's theory is “education for all, with the aim of freeing the population from all forms of oppression and inequality in order to achieve the transformation of society” (Morrow & Torres, 2002, p.116). Deepening our discussion, we recognize that Freire perceives education as a political act and not a mere transmission of knowledge and skills—a sociological experience (Guadiano & de Alba, 1994, p. 132; Shor, 1992) which, as a transformative act, is constructed by ordinary people who are given the opportunity to work out their potential in a collective political-social context (ibid, 1994, p.132-3). There, based on dialogue and communication, critical awareness emerges in a progressive process of self-liberation and collective liberation (Freire, 1976, pp.158-9). Therefore, to solve the educational problems/difficulties of his/her students, the teacher should look for solutions in the general cultural, historical, economic, and political context of each society (Darder, 2017), “utilizing the experiences that the students bring to the classroom at all levels to be critically processed with the help of the active participation of all students” (Freire, 1985, p. xx). That processing is accomplished, both “by introducing the topics of interest to learners in the learning process for reflection and, through a

structured dialogue with clear goals, rules, and directions, elucidating how to understand reality and seek their transformation” (Freire, 1977, pp. 101-109).

In Freire’s (1976) pedagogy, the educator cannot be a simple transmitter of knowledge addressed to passive recipients. Rather, he/she acts as a leader to create the conditions for an effective search for knowledge by learners, to strengthen their curiosity; questions, and energy; to encourage constructive dialogue aimed at awareness and liberation (ibid, 1976); and ultimately to drive action and change. As can be seen, the two most foundational elements of Freire’s theory, which are herein recognized as its pillars in their transformative action for the school community as an integral part of teachers’ Professional development, are the dialogue (face-to-face) and critical awareness in the process of which learners, as learning subjects, gain insight, not only of the reality that shapes and surrounds their lives, but also of their ability to transform, reshape and recognize this reality, and the choices that are opened to them (Freire, 2022). Nonetheless, the central proposition of his theory that no education is neutral but rather a political instrument, has been criticized. In Jarvis’ view, Freire’s theory is treated primarily as a political argument rather than as a theory of adult education. It is also questionable whether this model can be transferred to Western societies, as the conditions (political, socio-economic, and cultural) are quite different from those in Latin America.

Last but not least, Mezirow holds that “[r]eflective discourse and its resulting insight alone do not achieve TL. “Acting upon emancipatory insights, praxis is also necessary” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 12). Social action, in some form and in certain contexts, to change distorted meanings and assumptions can also be the purpose of a “consciousness-raising group” in such natural settings as the workplace or family environment” (1991, p. 181). A direct correlation between individual and social life is evident in many of Mezirow’s written texts; he considers the process of transformation to be a personal affair but one that also requires the acquisition and exercise of social skills. According to Mezirow, the individual cannot act impulsively but in cooperation and interaction with the people around him/her in the wider social context. That is, in order to be successfully pursued, the transformational process, although a personal matter, must be framed by other people with whom rational dialogue takes place in order to eliminate dysfunctional perceptions and adopt a critical approach to things.

Mezirow also affirms that by reflecting, the individual is able not only to process data and understand new information but also to enrich practice with it, thus linking theory with practice in “the creative implementation of a purpose” (1991, p.12). The conclusory outcome is that to produce knowledge, critical thinking must influence the experience.

Transformational change involves an internal change in how people and institutions act, (Cranton, 2016) the readings are ‘shouting’ very often within the literature. Researchers assert on the most profound and sustainable changes occur when new ways to think and act, are created, for people individually and even more for those in communities and institutions. In the readings (Kim & Graham, 2022). We can read about successful examples that represent a new relational and conversational culture of collaboration (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) within the school community. However, most frequently, teachers still strive in desolation with the exigencies of everyday practice lacking communication and reflective dialogue with colleagues regardless of their common struggles (Naz et al., 2022).

Therefore, I agree with Mezirow’s claim that “because no one can live without other people since experiences, goals, and values are better understood through communication, the central theme of adult learning is rational dialogue and critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991, p.2)

“Consequently, education for adults may be understood as centrally involved in creating and facilitating dialogic communities to enable learners to engage in rational discourse and action” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 354).

Concluding with the abovementioned theories we concede that teachers’ efforts should best be focused on the integration of new knowledge into the previous set in a strictly interactive environment

through creative dialogue, exchange of ideas and opinions, a reflection of thought, co-construction of meanings, an organized time schedule, goal-oriented, activity-oriented, learning-oriented (Knowles et.al, 2005), self-directed, and technologically updated (online, hybrid, etc.), means that compensate known constraints in adult learning. Furthermore, the goal of the transformational educator is to involve all actors in the school community- parents also- in a process of transformative learning in a communicative way and invite everyone to an internal and external dialogue among learners, where they are given the opportunity to critically reflect on their own and others' sociocultural, epistemic, psychological distortions, change them, and be willing to act upon the reformed set of beliefs (Mezirow, 1990).

A rational discourse among learners- especially for those with common aims such as teachers and parents- will bring to the surface different points of view that the learner can accept or not, reflect, or build upon—or not. This process has been found likely to yield learning and change. To enable this mental stretching, learners should be given the opportunity, in a designated space and time, to submit their questions and reflect. That must optimally occur in a safe environment, conducive to fresh thinking and dialogue, where learners discuss, think, express themselves freely, and learn that the power lies not in each of us individually but in the interaction of the participants.

4. Conclusion: Schools as Learning Organizations

Naturally, across the years, teachers have created their own counterproductive beliefs and assumptions that deprive them of trying to connect, discuss and relate to other teachers and their students' parents only as they provide auxiliary services. Having observed these behaviors from both sides as a parent and a teacher in schools in Greece, Italy, Germany, and the US, and gaining insight from studies on this matter, the need for collective change has become increasingly apparent. For the teacher-student-parent complex envisioned to act and learn together as a unified entity, it is most likely helpful to conceptualize and structure it to operate as a unified learning organization—one that Watkins and Marsick argue, will require deep changes in the actors' mindsets, and the culture of the organization—ones that occur only in a series of interrelated overlapping stages over time (1993, 1999). This is the process that Watkins and Marsick envision in their widely accepted Model, Dimensions of a Learning Organization. The potential seems real that, if it were able to keep learning continually it could potentially transform itself, and its members as individuals, as a group, and, ultimately, as a coherent organization through the three interrelated stages that characterize its emergence in its Model of Dimensions of a Learning Organization (ibid, 1998).

- Individual learning, i.e., the way in which people make meaning of their experiences, and how the organization provides them with opportunities to build their knowledge and skills,
- Team learning, i.e., the way in which groups of people work and learn collaboratively and, as a result, create new knowledge together as well as the capacity for collaborative action,

- Organizational learning, i.e., shared thinking and the capacity of a system that is embodied in systems, procedures, artifacts, and mental models, (Watkins and Marsick, 1999).

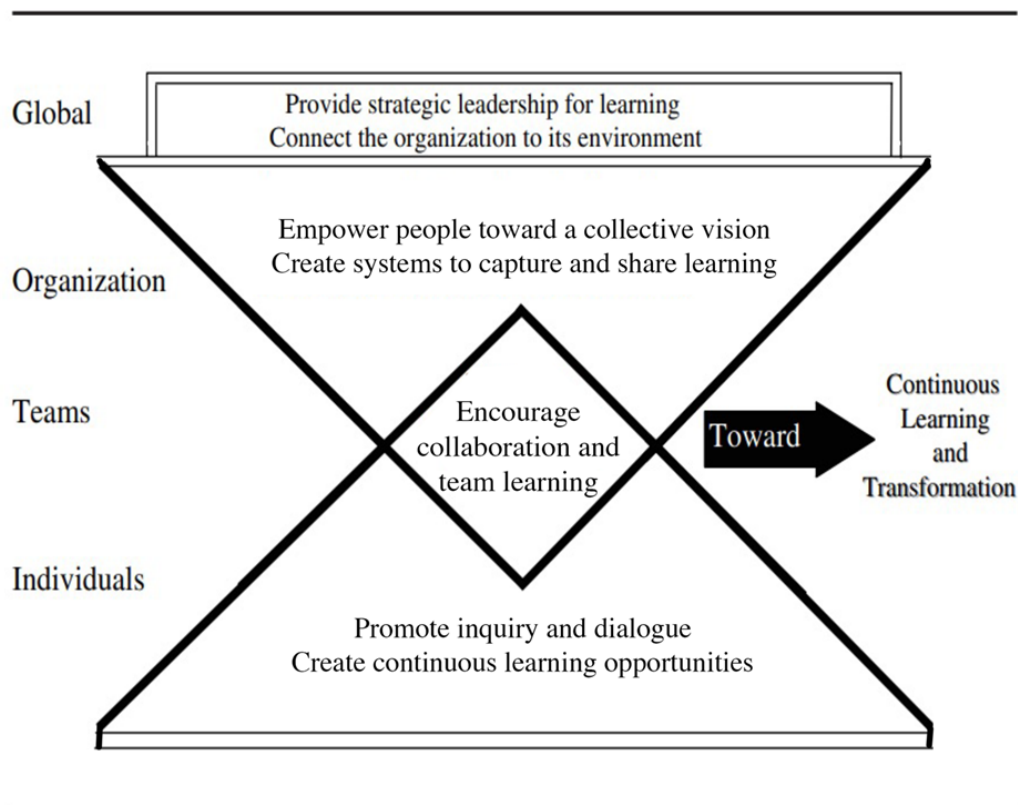


Figure 1. Watkins and Marsick, (1998) Model, Dimensions of a Learning Organization (Watkins, 2005)

Based on the assumption that "learning for organizational productivity cannot be separated from learning for personal development" (Marsick, 1998, p.191). Marsick and Watkins argue that traditional professional development programs are not sufficient for modern needs. Marsick proposes a new model in the field which includes both interactive and reflective learning as described in the theory of transformational learning. The basic argument is that "individuals are more productive when they can participate fully in the negotiation of their substantive contribution within the organization" (2015, p. 194). Furthermore, Marsick explains that adult education cannot be effective when it is limited to individual and largely predetermined actions rather than being shaped by the thoughtful collaboration of organizational members—a proposition, again pointing to the Theory of TL. In sum, their model utilizes the basic principles of TL to inform a new model for coherent organizational learning (Watkins et al., 2012). So, for the teachers-parents- school community to exist and operate in a unified way, it could best strive to become a Learning Organization—where students, teachers, parents, administrators, and staff can join way together to form a Community of Inquiry engaged in a collective effort with a common vision" (Watkins & Marsick, 1999).

The community could then constitute a "circuit" where learning is the ongoing goal for all actors. Sadly, only in the last decades has it been considered propitious—even necessary—for the parents to be an integrated part of the educational whole as well. It surely seems that it is time to involve all members in a continual learning culture that would benefit everyone involved, above all, the students. Such a transformation of the school community would necessitate an ongoing reformation of teaching and learning where the actors can overcome their natural predilection for a simplistic "single-loop" direct cause-effect approach to problems, and become willing to engage in the more complex (but usually more effective) double-loop (assumption-probing) learning and rather than the single-loop

learning that a and Schön (1978, 1996) have described in the deep dives into examining and challenging the underlying beliefs and assumptions that drive simplistic, symptom-removal, “solutions.”

The process of transformation is an individual affair, but I believe that to successfully realize it, a reference framework is needed in which learners interact with rational dialogue, which aims to contribute to a radical change of attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. The dialogue both depends upon and helps the learners to think critically, to change the perceptions they had formed both for themselves and propagated into the wider environment (which in this case is the same environment as that of the school and all those who participate in it), and to act differently in accordance with new democracy - promoting assumptions (Mezirow, 2007b). Then, learning can become transformational when, among other things, dialogue is how the adult—through new, modified functional perceptions and critical dialogue and reflection—can face and solve problematic situations anew (Mezirow, 2007b).

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