Transformative Learning as a Part of Living Theory:
A Constant Evolution of Transformative Learning Theory in Lifelong Education

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Transformative Learning Theory is one of the major adult learning theories. It has gained significant attention due to its potential to revolutionize education and personal development. Although its popularity has made it branch out from the adult learning theories as a distinct theory with unique characteristics and utilizations, the field of Transformative Learning has fallen into its own disorienting dilemma. The field of Transformative Learning is now in a critical phase as a field of study where it needs to refine itself to better develop its identity and grow. In this article, I will respond to the six questions regarding Transformative Learning Theory and the field of Transformative Learning that the editorial team of the journal asks below.

1. What are the elements that constitute the identity of the theoretical field of Transformative Learning?

Transformative Learning Theory is situated in the adult education theories where it focuses on the combination of several key elements: transformation and change in one's perspective from their life experiences, and critical examination of those experiences that together produce a dynamic shift in one's perspective or way of seeing the world (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 2009). Transformative Learning leads individuals to go beyond acquiring new knowledge or skills and leads to a significant change in how individuals understand themselves in a specific context. To get there, they need to go through critical reflection (Brookfield, 2012; Fleming, 2022). Transformative Learning requires individuals to engage in deep self-dialogue and critical reflection on their assumptions, beliefs, and values and emphasizes the importance of dialogue and discourse in the learning process (Taylor, 2000). Engaging in meaningful conversations with others and exploring diverse viewpoints can

contribute to transformative change. However, individuals may have to deal with their own emotions and manage those throughout the transformative learning process. Transformative Learning recognizes the importance of emotions and personal experiences in the learning process (Dirkx, 2006). It acknowledges that transformative change often involves emotional and sometimes difficult experiences. All of these involve questioning and challenging existing ideas and exploring alternative perspectives.

In addition, for individuals to experience and process Transformative Learning, it is crucial for them to consider how social and cultural contexts influence the process. So, Transformative Learning acknowledges that learning is shaped by social and cultural factors. It recognizes the influence of societal structures, power dynamics, and cultural norms on individuals' learning experiences (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006). At the same time, Transformative learning is not just about personal growth but also it aims to encourage action to make positive changes in society. It encourages individuals to apply their learning to address societal challenges and work towards social justice (Misawa, 2022). These elements collectively constitute to the identity of Transformative Learning as a theoretical field that focuses on personal and societal transformation through critical reflection, dialogue, and action.

2. What supports and what hinders the formation and development of this field?

When considering Transformative Learning as a theoretical field, it is crucial to have a consideration of how the formation and development of the field of Transformative Learning can be supported. One of the important elements that contributes to the formation and development of the field is a supportive educational environment. Creating such an environment is important because it encourages critical thinking, self-reflection, and open dialogue, which is crucial to Transformative Learning (Fleming, 2022; Mezirow, 2000). This includes having educators who are knowledgeable about Transformative Learning Theory and who are committed to facilitating the process of Transformative Learning. Having such an educational

environment supports the formation and development of the field of Transformative Learning.

In addition, having a access to a network and community is important when we think about the formation and development of the field. Conferences, workshops, journals, books, and online resources that provide information about Transformative Learning are useful and can gain some attraction and attention. Since the field is growing, educational and professional opportunities like national and international conferences can become a great support and opportunity for the field to engage not only in its own communities but also those from other fields. That also fosters collaboration, teaching-learning, and sharing experiences. Resources like that can support the field of Transformative Learning.

On the other hand, several factors can hinder the formation and development of the field of Transformative Learning. The current challenge, at least in some states in the US, is the resistance to change and the desire to maintain the status quo in educational institutions and societal systems (Misawa, 2010, 2022). Anything critical and different from conventional social and cultural norms and standards can be scrutinized by politicians and lawmakers and suppressed. For instance, some of the southern states in the United States now have a law that prohibits teaching so-called "divisive" concepts mainly including critical perspectives on race (Critical Race Theory) and LGBT issues. Perhaps, this relates to a lack of understanding about critical perspectives and transformative education among policymakers and the general public. These political and legal prohibitions hinder the formation and development of the field and can make it difficult for transformative learning approaches to be integrated into conventional educational structures and society at large. Overcoming these barriers requires a collective effort to advocate for the value and benefits of transformative learning and to create supportive environments that foster its growth and development.

3. How do you understand the concept of "living theory of TL"?

Scholars have discussed an interrelated connection between Living Theory and Transformative Learning Theory. The concept of Living Theory has been utilized in a wide variety of fields like education, psychology, and sociology and has gained popularity in various fields in education. Living Theory is a concept that refers to an individual's constantly evolving understanding of the world and themselves (Whitehead, 2009). It involves continually learning from experiences and using that knowledge to shape beliefs, values, and action (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). The idea is to actively seek personal growth and transformation while also making a positive impact on the community and society at large (Shrestha, 2021). This concept is similar to the notion of Transformative Learning Theory, in that it seeks to have an ongoing dynamic understanding of a person's transformation that evolves based on personal experiences, reflections, and actions (Tisdell, 2020). Thus, the concept of the Living Theory of Transformative Learning is the idea that transformative learning is a lifelong process that individuals actively engage in throughout their lives. And it recognizes that as we learn and grow, our understanding and perspective on transformation through Transformative Learning may alter and develop, leading to newer insights and theories.

4. How do you perceive the "deep change" that Transformative Learning can bring about?

Transformative Learning Theory focuses on bringing about deep change of individuals' existing beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives through critical reflection and self-examination, inviting people to question and reevaluate their values, attitudes, and behaviors (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000). When individuals start examining and questioning their existing beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives, they have to go through a process of "unlearning." It allows individuals to develop new ways of thinking and actions that align with their true selves and promotes personal growth and transformation. However, this process of unlearning is often difficult for some individuals since it can only happen when individuals are willing to accept or make

themselves open to see and understand other beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives. Without their willingness and openness to unlearning, deep changes and transformations in learning will not occur. The process of unlearning can create space for new perspectives, ideas, and possibilities and lead a profound shift in how practitioners perceive themselves, others, and the world, and it can lead to greater empathy, understanding and openness to alternative viewpoints. Through deep change, Transformative Learning enables individuals to develop a greater sense of self-awareness and self-discovery and reach and transcend horizons of knowledge, and become more intentional and purposeful in their lives.

5. What would you propose to enhance the progress of "living theory of TL"?

Living Theory of Transformative Learning is innovative and revolutionary. Any theory should evolve and constantly develop through continuous scholarship and practice. To enhance the progress of "Living Theory of Transformative Learning," I would propose the following key elements.

First, to enhance the progress of the Living Theory of Transformative Learning, it is important for educators and scholars to encourage practicing self-reflection in educational contexts including formal and informal education and workplace training. Learners should be encouraged to reflect on their own personal life experiences and actions to understand how they have become who they are today and see how they have grown and transformed because of their life experiences. This type of self-reflection can help them understand their own life histories and transformative learning process.

Second, in order to enhance the progress of the Living Theory of Transformative Learning, it is crucial to develop and foster a supportive learning community and network that embraces diverse perspectives. Developing a supportive learning community and network where individuals can share their life experiences without resistance or hesitation can enhance the progress of the Living Theory of Transformative Learning. Transformative Learning Theory has been utilized in various contexts not only in academia but also outside of academia. So, it is crucial to

recognize and embrace diverse perspectives. By engaging with different viewpoints and experiences, individuals can expand their understanding and challenge their preconceived notions, leading to further growth and development. The community and network can facilitate future development and connections and can contribute to developing and refining Transformative Learning Theory.

Last, it is important to think about how Transformative Learning can be used in ongoing research and how it can be applied in various contests. In any academic field, creating knowledge through scholarship and disseminating it to individuals in the field and society are key tasks for the field to grow and survive. So, Transformative Learning scholars also think about how they can contribute to those key tasks inside and outside of the field of Transformative Learning. In addition, having a clear understanding and identity of the applicability of the theory will be essential. This involves implementation of transformative learning approaches in various contexts such as education, workplace, and personal development programs to see how those approaches are applicable to those individuals in those contexts. By doing so, we can refine approaches and theory itself to make them more applicable, effective, and impactful.

6. **What is the position of Mezirow's "Transformation Theory", as well as other theoretical perspectives, within this process?**

Based on the relevant literature, Transformation Theory is the theory of a learning process by which the individual moves from an unexamined way of thinking to a more examined and critically reflective way. It focuses on how individuals can undergo a profound shift in their perspectives, beliefs, and ways of thinking through critical reflection and self-examination (Mezirow, 2000). This theory emphasizes the importance of challenging assumptions, looking for alternative viewpoints, and integrating new insights into one's worldview. Both Living Theory and Mezirow's Transformation Theory address changes in one's perspectives through critical self reflection. Both theories intersect in many ways and are mutually inclusive and could be used in place of the other in the process of transformative learning.

Other theoretical perspectives that are relevant to this process include change theory, which focuses on making changes not only in individuals but also in organizations and communities from critical assessments through action learning processes, from identification of issues to plans of action to change, and from implementation of the changes to evaluation of the changes. Also, constructivism fits in here in that it focuses on the active construction of knowledge and understanding through lived experiences. There is also Social Cognitive Theory, which explores how individuals learn from observing others in social contexts and through self-efficacy beliefs.

Concluding Remarks

This article explored Transformative Learning Theory and the field of Transformative Learning through Living Theory by responding to six key questions. Transformative Learning Theory has been utilized to understand how individuals examine and transform their own beliefs and assumptions through self-reflection. These individual acts also impact the larger community and society, helping people to be more critical and innovative. This increase in popularity of the theory has led to its growth and expansion. Transformative Learning Theory may be used in different theoretical perspectives to contribute to our understanding of transformative learning by highlighting various factors and processes involved in personal growth, cognitive development, and the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. By considering these perspectives, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals undergo transformative experiences and navigate their learning journeys.

In conclusion, transformative learning has immense potential for personal and societal growth as the Living Theory of Transformative Learning. As the field of Transformative Learning grows and expands, it is crucial for the field to understand how to capture the essence of Transformative Learning Theory in various ways in different contexts. By promoting the benefits of such critical reflection, we can inspire others to embrace this powerful theory for positive change and create a more democratic and inclusive world.