Transformational Learning
A Literature Review of Contemporary Criticism, and a Path Forward

Transformational learning theory is one of the least consistently defined and explained learning theories. Its origins can be identified, as well as the kinds of problems the theory seeks to remEDIATE and the intended outcomes (in general), but recent critical literature highlights the present gap between theoretical constructs and practical implementation. In essence, scholars understand there is a kind of learning that transforms, and that this transformation is a useful and indeed necessary pursuit to tackle workplace issues of equality, compassion, and ethics, or social issues such as racism, justice, and reconciliation. But beyond that essence, there is little agreement on anything practical or useful for scalable implementation.

**PURPOSE**
(1) Assess the current state of academic thought.
(2) Report trends in criticism.
(3) Offer suggestion to advance the scholarly discussion.

**METHOD**
Survey of critical literature produced in the last ten years.
Summarize findings in literature review.

**CONCLUSIONS**
Despite numerous conceptions, the identification and engagement of guiding questions, and the growing consensus on how to articulate what the theory actually targets, practitioners still do not seem to know what or how to catalyze transformational learning. The theory requires further development, with renewed focus on non-traditional and/or non-rational socio-psycological solutions.

**FOUR COMMON TRENDS IN CRITICAL LITERATURE**

**TREND ONE: ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS**
Modifications to or reimaginings of Mezirow’s foundational work, particularly related to the narrow inclusion of non-rational, emotional, and social influencers of learning.

**TREND TWO: PONDERING CAUSE**
While pointing out a lack of clarity in Mezirow, a focus is given to identify what causes transformational learning, and what learning domain may be strategically targeted to promote it.

**TREND THREE: IDENTITY LANGUAGE**
Answering the question of cause through the use of identity language (i.e. personhood, personality, self, soul, wholeness, being, etc.) to describe the target of transformational learning.

**TREND FOUR: NON-PRACTICAL**
Lacking any thorough discussion of how practitioners might promote or implement transformational learning.

**IMPLICATIONS**
Appropriate application of the provocative, non-rational, emotional, and social influencers (summarized by “identity” language), which may be the crux of transformational learning, require further investigation. This investigation may lead to practical, repeatable methods to implement a transformational learning strategy in the workplace and social institutions.

**A PATH FORWARD**
Recomendations for further research on possible catalytic agents and root causes for transformational learning include:

**Struggle.** The experience or observation of ‘disorienting dilemma’ that produces epistemological perspective shifts.

**Story.** Introduce compelling narratives to inspire dramatic change in identity.

**Connectedness.** One’s sense of connection to some external entity that gives some measure of meaning to their identity.

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