Introduction

The study of transformative learning, the process of making meaning of one’s experience, is continually being investigated within the field of adult education. As a concept it emerged over 20 years ago, beginning with the original study by Jack Mezirow (1978a), who investigated the learning experience of women returning to school after a long hiatus. Since that time numerous studies have emerged exploring transformative learning in relationship to community and social transformation, intercultural learning, courage, critical reflection, whole person learning, and lifestyle and career change, to mention just a few. Presently, as an area of study, transformative learning continues to be of interest, as when it first emerged in the field. For example, at the 1997 Adult Education Research Conference in Oklahoma State University, transformative learning was the focus of more presentations than any other concept or idea discussed—over 10% of the papers presented.

Looking back over most all the work that has been written about transformative learning, two general patterns emerge. One pattern involves published papers that have tended to focus predominantly on theoretical critique centering on issues of social action, critical pedagogy, adult development, reflection, and context and rationality. The second involves over 40 unpublished empirical studies that were completed by graduate students for doctoral dissertations. Only until very recently have these studies been reviewed\(^1\) (Taylor 1997a). From this recent review emerges a supportive, but critical picture of transformative learning theory. It reveals a learning process that needs to recognize to a greater degree the significant influence of context, the varying nature of the catalyst of the process, the minimization of the role of critical reflection and increased role of other ways of knowing and relationships, and an overall broadening of the definitional outcome of a perspective transformation. Furthermore, and significant to this monograph, there has been (until very recently) only minimal investigation into the practice of fostering transformative learning. More specifically, the review found the practice for fostering transformative learning ideally conceptualized, theoretically based, and offering little support from empirical research or practical experience. Adult educators are

\(^1\) Significant portions of Taylor’s (1997a) review of the empirical studies of transformative learning are included in this monograph, with the addition of six recent studies.
CONCLUSION

The introduction of transformative learning theory (Mezirow & Associates, 1996) and the related empirical studies have been instrumental in shaping the agenda of transformative learning research. The practice of transformative learning pedagogy, which is based on the theoretical framework of perspective transformation, has been increasingly recognized as a powerful tool for personal, social, and cultural transformation.

However, the implementation of transformative learning pedagogy in educational settings has not been without challenges. The lack of clear guidelines and the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the process of perspective transformation have led to difficulties in the application of transformative learning in the classroom. Moreover, the emphasis on individual transformation has sometimes overshadowed the importance of collective action and social change.

To address these challenges, it is essential to develop a more robust understanding of the theoretical and empirical dimensions of transformative learning. This involves examining the theoretical critiques and empirical studies in concert, as well as exploring new perspectives on the nature of transformative learning. By doing so, we can better understand the complexities of the transformative learning process and develop more effective strategies for promoting personal, social, and cultural change.
pedagogy. This final section attempts to explain transformative pedagogy by looking at several studies in depth, revealing the essential conditions and challenges associated with fostering transformative learning. It is important to note that this monograph focuses almost exclusively on empirical studies and critiques of transformative learning theory by Jack Mezirow, making a particular point not to include conceptual literature that does not directly inform this review.

My hope is that this monograph will appeal to a wide audience of adult educators, with each section offering something for those interested in transformative learning. Those who want an introductory perspective on transformative learning can peruse the first section. Researchers who wants to review other studies and get updated on the latest research can turn to the second section. And those who are interested in challenges of fostering of transformative learning (transformative pedagogy) should explore the third and final section.
INTRODUCTION