Implement the transformative learning theory through Dolceta Project

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Abstracts
Transformative Learning Theory, known as Mezirow's Theory, is one of nowadays learning theory which underlines the rational and analytical part of the process as well as spiritual or emotional part of the learning process. Mezirow posits that all learning is change but not all change is transformation - that is a very critical point in building of a positive attitude of the individuals which are under the education umbrella. Transformative Learning having three phases: critical reflection, reflective discourse and action, could be found into Dolceta – on-line consumer education – site, as possible example of people in action for "win-win". Win-win what? Dignity of individuals for knowing their rights by applying in their everyday life of the critical reflection and reflective discourse after an intellectual effort for learning (e-learning).
Keywords: transformative learning, critical reflection, reflective discourse, action, on-line consumer education

The study of transformative learning emerged with the work of Jack Mezirow (1981, 1994, and 1997). Mezirow (1981) developed the concepts of **"meaning perspectives",** one's overall world-view, and **"meaning schemes",** smaller components which contain specific knowledge, values, and beliefs about one's experiences. A number of meaning schemes work together to generate one's meaning perspective. Meaning perspectives are acquired passively during childhood and youth, and are the target of the transformation that occurs through

experience during adulthood. They operate as perceptual filters that determine how an individual will organize and interpret the meaning of his/her life's experiences.

Transformative learning is defined as **learning that induces more far-reaching change in the learner than other kinds of learning, especially learning experiences which shape the learner and produce a significant impact, or paradigm shift, which affects the learner's subsequent experiences** (Clark, 1993).

Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 2000), describe a learning process of **"becoming critically aware of one's own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation"** (Mezirow, 2000, p. 4).

Mezirow posits that **all learning is change but not all change is transformation**. There is a **difference between transmissional, transactional and transformational education** (Miller & Seller, 1990). In the first, **knowledge is transmitted from teacher to student**. In transactional education, it is recognized that **the student has valuable experiences, and learns best through experience, inquiry, critical thinking and interaction with other learners**. It could be argued that some of the research regarding transformative learning has been in the realm of transactional education, and that what is seen as transformative by some authors (e.g. Cragg et al., 2001) is in fact still within the realm of transactional learning.

An important part of **transformative learning is for individuals to change their frames of reference by critically reflecting on their assumptions and beliefs and consciously making and implementing plans that bring about new ways of defining their worlds. This process is fundamentally rational and analytical**.

Therefore a number of scholars argued that while **this learning process is certainly rational** on some levels, **it is also a profound experience** that can be described as **a spiritual or emotional transformation as well.**

Mezirow emphasizes that **transformative learning is rooted in the way human beings communicate, and does not link it exclusively with significant life events of the learner.** Through this combination of reflection and discourse, the learner was able to make shifts in his/her world view which produced a more inclusive world-view. For Mezirow, **one of the benefits of transformative learning was the development**

of greater autonomy as a person, a defining condition of adulthood (Mezirow, 1997).

From other point of view, Mezirow describes a **transformative learning environment as one in which those participating have full information, are free from coercion, have equal opportunity to assume various roles, can become critically reflective of assumptions, are empathetic and good listeners, and are willing to search for common ground or a synthesis of different points of view.**

Daloz (1986) recognized that **transformative learning can be a risky and frightening journey into the unknown**, as learners are challenged to let go of old conceptualizations of self and the world. He challenged educators to structure their teaching for fostering personal development of the learners rather than developing specific competencies. He frequently used the metaphor of **transformation as a journey in which the mentor or educator served as a gatekeeper as well as a guide for learners on the journey** (Daloz, 1999).

Boyd and Myers (as cited in Imel, 1998) **encouraged educators to develop and practice two characteristics**. **First was seasoned guidance, the ability to serve as an experienced mentor reflecting on his/her own journey, with the intent to assist others with their transformational process. Second, they valued compassionate criticism, assisting learners to question their own reality in ways that would promote transformation of their world view.**

We can tie all these aspects of transformative learning with the development of Dolceta project and the concepts it contains. From our point of view **all the modules on Dolceta site have a lot of elements that lead to transformative learning, developing from users: critical reflection, reflective discourse and action** (Merriam and Caffarella 1999), that the three phases of Transformative Learning Theory of Mezirow.

In nowadays, people wants to learn quickly for applying in the real life. That's the way promoted by **"Dolceta" Project**, an "Online Consumer Education", **implementing Mezirow Theory into the e-learning process, in synchronous way.**

The project, devised for the 2006-2011 period of time, is lead at European level by EUCEN in cooperation with EAEA and includes all 27 EU Members States, involving representatives from universities, consumers' associations and adult education organisations.

The target groups of Dolceta project are primarily: schoolteachers, professors, trainers and adult educators in educational institutions, government bodies with consumer responsibilities, consumer associations etc. and secondly, individual consumers, directly.

The project supposed to produce and disseminate on-line learning material, to provide useful information, to develop various skills, and especially to make people aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, in terms of consumers. They can access the materials produced and further info on the site www.dolceta.eu:

Fig. 1. *Homepage of Dolceta*

On Dolceta website for the moment there are seven modules:
- o *Teacher's Corner, containing::*
  - *Consumer education,*
  - *Sustainable consumption,*
  - *Financial education,*
- o *Consumer rights,*
- o *Financial services,*
- o *Product Safety,*
- o *Services (energy, transport, communication…).*

All those modules are for all the EU Members States in their National language and for Romanian consumers, in Romanian, under the noble slogan of informing and training the users.

As we observing from figure bellow, in the National homepage there are: *Info button*, *Icons for each of those seven modules* and a *Slogan*

Fig. 2. *Homepage of Romanian modules from Dolceta site*

The project offer (as shows above) attractive, accessible and interactive on-line learning material to teachers in the primary, secondary, and high school, as well to trainers in adult education in "Teacher's corner".

All the modules was developed by all the partners of Dolceta project, in their own manner, but taking in consideration a common framework, delivered by an international / European team, which designed the template of each module.

The texts that are presented in the articles of the modules have different length and developments. In each section there is a space, with text of presentation of the theme. The majority of the texts, in the articles, were based in our own legislation overlap with European legislation in the subject and written in a clear and synthetic way. If we didn't found in national legislation some of the articles, we have

followed the European legislation. Those texts are thought to not very much literate people in the field and, we hope, are clear and divided into small pieces with an appealing title, and didn't be boring for the "consumer". The texts are followed examples to help users' understanding and by quizzes, a very interactive way of self-evaluation. By the other hand, being pictures insert into the most of the pages of the modules they are very aesthetic and attractive. Links to websites and further reading are included also in all the modules.

In the bottom of each module we can see some buttons which link the page with: *Online survey, Top of page, Change country, Romanian Homepage, Development team, Disclaimer*, all actives and useful for the visitors of the site. In front page of each module there are buttons for: *National homepage*, *Select your country*, *Search, Icon plan site* and *Icon for printing.* In the mean time, as it observed on the figure bellow, there is Dolceta logo!

Fig. 3. *Homepage of "Consumer education" module*

Because the variety of topics are so large in the entire project, we involved members of various specializations such as: consumer rights, consumption, food and product safety, sustainability, finance, management, law, science of education, English and IT. All the

members of curriculum development of the modules are experts in their domains and have a national and international recognition.

We have tried to use all our thoughts for implement the transformative learning theory into Dolceta project for growing up the users' knowledge, skills and attitudes, in consumer education!

Transformative learning may not always be a goal of consumer education, but its importance should not be overlooked and all educators should strive to understand it, even if they do not choose to foster it.

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