



The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation

Edited by

Aliki Nicolaides · Saskia Eschenbacher
Petra T. Buergelt · Yabome Gilpin-Jackson
Marguerite Welch · Mitsunori Misawa

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“An exciting injection of fresh ideas and insights into a field that risks becoming ‘stuck’ and moribund! The editors of this Handbook bring together a remarkable and impressive set of international scholars and practitioners representing a wide range of geographical, disciplinary, and cultural perspectives in the field of transformative learning. Using the metaphor of ‘provocation’ as a lens and a world-wide pandemic as a backdrop, they challenge us as practitioners and scholars to re-envision our work and. Illuminating long-standing tensions and issues in the field, they bring new understandings to the meaning and practice of transformative learning, effectively blurring the lines between theory and practice and scholars and practitioners. Reflecting on this emerging future, the editors and authors invite us to use this moment and these provocations and propositions to transform ourselves, our worlds, and the field itself.”

—John M. Dirkx, *Professor and Mildred B. Erickson Distinguished Chair (Emeritus) at Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education, Michigan State University, U.S.A.*

“When Tony Blair in 1997 was elected as British prime minister a reporter asked him what would be the three most important topics of his future policy. The famous reply was: ‘education, education, education!’ - and so Blair very soon started what became a consequent top-down streamlining and control of British schooling, which has certainly not resulted in any better and more versatile learning. The basis of this was a rather primitive understanding of human learning as a direct transfer of what is taught. The most consequent contrast to this is the concept and idea of transformative learning as introduced by Jack Mezirow in 1978 and later further developed in many ways. The present book can be seen as the most extensive publication of the interpretation and further development of this much more fruitful and forward-looking concept and approach of learning.”

—Knud Illeris, *Professor Emeritus at Roskilde University, Denmark*

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FOREWORD BY VICTORIA J. MARSICK, ELIZABETH KASL AND KAREN E. WATKINS

We are honored to invite you into this Handbook in this Foreword. We trust you will find a strong and compelling vision of passages to transformation in these pages.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

To situate our look forward, we begin by looking back. This Handbook has its roots in a discourse that blossomed in the adult education literature in the 1970s when Jack Mezirow began his quest to develop a comprehensive theory of adult learning. Our purpose here is to mark his effort to craft theory unbounded by disciplinary knowledge silos. Mezirow explains this effort:

Psychologists interested in adult learning often find themselves trapped within the framework of particular theories and paradigms.... Philosophers, linguists, sociologists, and political scientists also have legitimate interests in adult learning, but each group has a different frame of reference and a different vocabulary for interpreting the phenomenon. Few efforts have been made to develop a synthesis of the different theories that educators of adults can use. (1991, p. xi)

Over the years, adult educators have continued to expand the breadth of disciplines that inform our understanding of learning that transforms (Anand et al., 2020; Taylor, 2008).

This Handbook is the next milestone in that quest. Readers will broaden their horizons as they consider transformation from multiple perspectives—some that will be familiar, others that will be new. Handbook editors use the metaphor of “passageways” to entice readers into a pursuit of knowledge gleaned from crossing borders and possibly dissolving them:

Our guiding metaphor in creating this Handbook is *passageways*.... A passage points to two directions—backwards to the space one is leaving and forward to the space one is approaching.... Our intention is to invite the reader to “pass through,” that is, to leave the familiar space that currently defines the territory of transformative learning and turn toward something new....

So what might readers expect as they pass through?

We note that “trans” is a Latin prefix meaning “across,” “beyond,” or “on the other side of.” A few “trans” words describe the passageways that beckon readers.

- Transform: change in composition, structure, character, or condition
- Transition: process or period of changing from one state or condition to another
- Transcend: to go farther, rise above, or go beyond the limits of
- Transdisciplinary: integrating disciplines, transcending traditional boundaries

In planning the Handbook, editors called authors to reach for new horizons in conceptualizing transformative learning and transformation. They embodied this call with their first tentative title, which was “Trans*****.” We applaud this invitation to find new configurations. A passageway is a liminal space—a space of limitless possibility as the passersby considers multiple possibilities in search of new understanding.

Creating Spaces of Possibility

Complexity science encourages us to see the way learning—especially transformational learning—allows us to emerge from the chaos of multiple perspectives with a new coherence (Juarrero, in Watkins et al., 2021). This occurs in part because of the sense making we do through

the interconnected networks we are part of (Siemens, in Watkins et al., 2021). This Handbook creates a space of possibility (Juarrero, in Watkins et al., 2021) for a new coherence around the meaning of transformation to emerge.

In the spirit of seeking new horizons and new coherence, especially for our tribe of adult education scholar-practitioners, we reached out to people who are not adult educators and asked them about their vision of transformation.

Taking advantage of our common experience with one of the most dramatic moments in the past century, we used the concrete example of the global pandemic as a point of departure for thinking about transformation. Polling friends, family, and colleagues from different walks of life, we asked:

1. When you think about transformation of individuals, groups, systems, and/or communities post COVID-19, how would you characterize this emerging transformation?
2. What example comes to mind to illustrate your thinking about transformation?

People commented on the ways in which they have learned to live with uncertainty and the need to pivot on a dime, their need for connection and how they have found ways to attain this, the differential experiences of the poor and marginalized, and some of the fundamental changes in work environments that have impacted them.

Our respondents thought about the personal transformations triggered by the pandemic and shared what this meant to them, especially the way we are rediscovering our common humanity in our little corners of the world.

it is a discovery of other aspects of the colleagues we have been used to know for how they deal with academic issues or for their ideas, but not for their creativity or for their personal interests and tastes. We are discovering and sharing family histories; we are entering each other's kitchens; we are encountering the others in new and different terms...—Maura Striano, University of Naples Federico II

The view outside my window has become more important to me. It is truly my window on the world.—Nancy Dixon

They thought about this as a global phenomenon:

Lost and found. Found and lost. There have been other cataclysmic events in human history - yet the closest I can find to this is the spread of smallpox among indigenous peoples in the Americas - where entire cultures were wiped out (Aztecs and the Inca). While this disease will likely not destroy mankind - it is changing cultures throughout the world. The ambiguity that comes from this cultural assault combined with other transformative activities (generational shifts, technological shifts) will be merged into the transformed culture on some level. My question is 'Will the ambiguity lead to an awakening to our human mortality and the invasive nature of our activities?' And if so, what will our collective response be?—Jill Jinks

I believe we are becoming more aware of the connections we share globally; more aware of work-life balance; more aware of the freedoms/empowerment we have that we sacrifice to organizations when we go "to work" at an office 40+ hours/week.—No name

So the ambiguity and liminal state of unknowing has reminded us of our global interconnectedness as well as the sacrifices we have taken for granted as part of working. These reflections have led to some changes of values and perspective.

I think the biggest transformation has been one of perspective. Things that we previously took for granted as being available (public interactions, social gatherings, being able to visit a dying loved one in the hospital) are no longer a given. We have to re-think our decisions and actions pre-Covid and look at them in the new reality of what life is like now, or might be in the future. We also, as individual or groups, have to weigh the risks associated with each social activity against the possibility that we, friends/family, or strangers may be negatively affected by our actions if we are unknowingly contagious. This forces us to consider ourselves and others in ways we might not have considered previously. This change in perspective includes major life decisions, such as career trajectory (is my occupation pandemic-proof?) or more subtle ones (what do I get out of eating at a restaurant and is it worth it?).—Bonnie Marsick Decker

Covid has propelled us out of many of our routines. While some of business as usual has just moved to virtual, taking more time, in other ways it has given us a chance to step out of our habits and routinized patterns to question the ways we have worked in the past and wonder about better ways to work. I think Covid has also given us an opportunity to stop and think about what really is important to us, sometimes raising some

uncomfortable questions. To be transformed as people or organizations or cultures, we will need to be willing to openly pursue even those uncomfortable questions. What is worth doing? What's the best way to work? How can we stay connected--really connected?—Betsy Aylin

These reflections describe the individual and potentially global perspective changes we may experience but do not alter our understanding of transformation. A couple of other comments hint of a deeper shift in transformation.

I was thinking about sexual development—an ongoing process over one's lifetime - as one of the most astounding series of transformations—the processes of coming to understand, and often repeatedly re-understand/re-define who you are as a sexual being and as a romantic partner. Some aspects of these transformations are guided by biological changes over which you have no control, while others, if they happen, are the result of much more intentional reflection - figuring out who you are, who you want to be, what you want from relationships, and what your relationship is to both your community and societal norms, to list just a few examples. These constitute so many moments of disorientation about things that are core to your existence and identity - discovering feelings you didn't know you had; discovering subconscious or suppressed desires, goals, agendas and past experiences; questioning your values; and discovering things you do and don't like about yourself and your interactions with others at both individual and community levels. As I think about all those moments of disorientation, it strikes me that there's something of a spectrum that may be useful in thinking through transformation - on one end are aspects of transformation that involve reflection and willful action and on the other end are things that will simply happen regardless of intention or intended action.—Adam Neaman

I think more and more people are experiencing world events (the pandemic, climate change & infrastructure failings, racial and society polarization and fracturing) that leave them feeling over their heads with complexity and a sense of overwhelm. Old ways of knowing and being are not working so some of us hunker down and cling to what we know and others of us feel the draw of opening up and surrender. I honestly am in a state of unknowing about what comes next -- how we will individually and collectively adapt to this emerging demand to evolve ... If transformation requires a liminal state of “unknowing” then this is where we are right now.—Renee Rogers

These reflections look at the difference in our experiences of transformation when the trigger is outside of our control vs. when we learn through personal reflection and also speak to the complexity and uncertainty of our experience of world events. We are in a liminal state of unknowing, what Ann Pendleton-Jullian (in Watkins et al., 2021) describes as working at the periphery.

Pendleton-Jullian's concept of work at the periphery calls for exploring many different avenues of meaning without closure of any options. This allows us to push ourselves into the liminal space beyond the bounds of our usual habits of mind. She opens and keeps open multiple lines of inquiry. These different "looks" at a situation invite the curious side of the brain to "sense breaking" to enable new orders of sense making. Keeping our attention on multiple lines of inquiry at the same time demands that the mind embrace and live with paradox and contradictions. We do not resolve our perplexity by choosing one direction over another; rather we remain in this state of perplexity, live in this dynamic tension, and in so doing, enable emergence of radically new "spaces." This Handbook is an excellent example of pursuing multiple passageways toward an emerging vision of transformation as yet undiscovered—still just a little out of reach.

PASSING THE TORCH

We started this Foreword by noting the growth and variety in the scholarship of transformative learning. Yet, we also note that the research has been constricted by the homogeneity of the scholars theorizing and researching transformative learning. To date, our scholarship is dominated by the experiences of Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic or (WEIRD) populations (Muthukrishna, et al., 2020). Ironically, transformative learning calls for opening up boundaries, inviting diversity, engaging in perspective taking, and revising beliefs and assumptions to grow views and mindsets. But the lack of diversity in the community of transformative learning scholars—and the potential negative messages that lack of diversity sends to the community's members—is a contradiction to the theory.

Some efforts have been made over time to transform the community of transformative learners in order to welcome and value work from many different disciplines, cultural traditions, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic disparities—without much noticeable impact. Hoping to make

progress with walking the talk of inclusion, organizers for the 2018 transformation learning conference chose the conference theme, “Building Transformative Community: Exacting Possibility in Today’s Times.”

Among the steps organizers took to further their goal was an action research study focused on inclusion. Twenty-two stakeholders—scholars, conference organizers, leaders, and community members—were asked how easy or difficult it is for a new person to become a member of the community and what barriers stand in the way of inclusiveness. Results indicated that as recently as the previous conference in 2016, creating a culture of inclusion continued to be a problem. One interviewee reported: “At the Tacoma conference, it broke my heart when this young African American woman, a first timer, stood up in the final session and said, ‘I don’t feel welcome here. I don’t see people who look like me. I just don’t feel comfortable, and I don’t feel included.’” An African-American scholar who had researched transformative learning in an African-American community did not feel her work was valued because the community “didn’t grab it.” Most interviewees in the convenience sample reported that a big barrier to inclusion was the perception of an “insider” group whose members did not seek to extend their boundaries.

The 2018 conference sought multiple ways to invite participation of diverse members to change the conference’s culture toward inclusion. For example, in a compelling and moving plenary session, a panel of scholars and practitioners shared their personal stories of transformative learning related to structural racism and microaggressions (Welch et al., 2020). An Inclusion Committee infused the conference with activities and guidelines to support engagement. One of these activities was the communal creation of a sand painting. Bert Benally, Dine artist from the Navajo Nation, facilitated this process “where participants can together identify an area causing disharmony in and find a symbol of the problem and another symbol or representation to correct that problem” (Welch et al., 2018, p. 52). These are examples of many efforts to draw in and value diversity of voices and perspectives.

This Handbook grew out of the groundwork laid in the 2018 conference. The editors have taken up the mantle of reinventing the way members in our community organize ourselves, our collective work, and our impulse toward a culture of greater inclusiveness. The Handbook is itself designed to open up new perspectives.

Mezirow grounded his view of transformative learning in rational discourse which embraced diversity of thought by advocating

examination of assumptions in order to re-draw our collective understanding of ourselves and our worlds. The Editors of this Handbook invite us to a different way of sense making and sense breaking. They ask us to enter the liminal space of these passageways and to live in the tension of conflicting viewpoints while we seek to midwife emergence—as the authors we meet in these pages work at the periphery to open up different avenues of meaning making.

We pass the torch to these exciting new voices of transformative learning who are making sense of new generations of thought and practice in describing our shared complex world. Perhaps they will dis[RUPT]¹ old ways of seeing the world and invite us to a new journey of transformation.

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¹ Rapid, Unpredictable, Paradoxical, Tangled—from the Center for Creative Leadership??

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FOREWORD BY AHREUM LIM

If anyone asks me how it was to work on this colossal project with 6 editors and 103 authors who share different cultural backgrounds, live in different time zones, and most importantly, whom I have never met before in a human form, I would suggest them to imagine a kid who comes to the swimming pool for the first time after graduating from a beginner's class. Imagine that the kid, who is just holding on her kickboard in the water, gets to watch a bunch of grown-ups swimming beyond the lane lines, without any kickboards freely. Surprisingly, they are gentle enough to let her join in and be one of the cool gangs, teaching her how to swim freely. Initially, the kid feels feel terrified, as it feels like starting a new way of living in the water. She doesn't want to look like a beginner ... although she is. Thus, she tries her best to let herself float in the water, even though she has no idea of what she is doing. Often, fear kicks in, when water suddenly gets up her nose, and she feels as if she is drowning. However, the generous helpers coach her to paddle harder, push the water harder, and find a balance of her own. Essentially, they are teaching her to get a sense of what it means to glide in the water somehow. Swimming closely with them is teaching her how to swim.

The analogy beautifully sketches my working experience with this team of utmost diversity as well as the Handbook itself. Six editors who wanted to create a portal toward a newer theory of transformation invited 103 authors who are sympathetic with their audacity to join the team. We had countless email exchanges. The editorial team held regular—more than

20—two-hour-long Zoom meetings that glued us together during the long global pandemic, with a twenty-minute-long check-in that summed up our past weeks of agony, joy, relief, and excitement, followed by a lively conversation over the chapters, reviews, and editorial feedback, for one sole purpose: creating a handbook that vitalizes the learning for transformation theory.

The goal is to let the readers swim beyond the lane lines. However, the way in which the editors open up the portal for the readers to escape from their comfort zone is inclusive, yet with discretion. Despite the rooted discipline of the theory, transformative learning invites epistemology beyond one discipline. Often the smorgasbord approach endangers the theory by making it a theory of everything, which would hinder rigor and dwindle faith in the theory. This Handbook refuses it deliberately. Instead, the Handbook offers a space that braids the lines of thought that are generated in different disciplines and/or contexts with different theoretical underpinnings, under the common scholarly interest in the quest for the transformation. Thus, their portal is rather exclusive, opening up the passage only for those who are committed to the field of transformation. Meanwhile, the authors offer this Handbook as a new provocation, one that surfaces the unheard voices, underexplored theories, and unprecedented methodologies of transformation, to make the portal inclusive.

However, this book is not only about challenging the normative practice. The editors do not want to throw you in the water without any protection. Reading this book, each provocation may feel as if the editors are holding your hand, watching you glide through water in a distance, coaching you on your stroke, or finally letting you swim on wherever you want. The chapters curated per provocation let the help emerge. In *Provocation 1: The Many Turns of Transformation*, the authors theoretically examine transformative learning theory and further discuss how their understanding departs from and beyond Mezirow's transformative learning. The theoretical root of transformative learning may make you feel a bit safe pedaling through the known water. In *Provocation 2: Generating Conditions for Transformation*, the authors present inquiry on how to facilitate transformation in different conditions. The practices that the authors suggest will give you sense on how to swim in the current. In *Provocation 3: (Un)known Discourses of Transformation*, the authors trouble the condition. You feel as if the water that you are swimming in

is not still but constantly shifting. The unsurfaced discourses on transformation may let you sit in a happy confusion that may lead you to reimagine the theory and transformation. The chapters in *Provocation 4: Challenges and Emerging Future of Transformation* embody the reimagination. Through Provocations 3 and 4 you might learn how to swim against the current while finding joy in it.

As a doctoral student who has not yet emerged into the world of academia, my honest impression-of working with the editors, who are brave enough to welcome new thoughts, methods, and inquiries outside of the boundary, was disorienting yet tantalizing. Observing the way they slide through disciplinary boundaries, which I have been taught to be firmly established, made me think of the potency of the theory of transformation. The lively dialogue that I joined as a manager of the team, and the way in which these passionate scholars with different disciplinary focuses formed a dialogic space and allowed themselves to stay comfortable during the difficult dialogues, led me to feel their commitment as stewards of the concept of transformation. For me, this whole process of editing, managing, and participating is a part of my training to swim into deeper water.

I believe this book, which is an intertwining of theory, stewardship, and companionship—a passageway that connects the legacy of a living theory with current and real tumultuous conditions that invite new inquiries about transformation—intends to be disorienting, complex, and indeterminate. I also believe that this book is worth diving into as the authors and editors not only catch the current, but also are brave enough to trouble the currents. My advice for you, the reader, is to take a deep breath, and bravely dive into the water. Just jump in—when you come up for air, you may discover that you have come far from the land you were hesitant to leave.

Ahreum Lim
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THE FRAGRANT MOUNTAIN WINDS

We all feel helpless, clueless as to how to face the challenges ahead. Ever since the devastation of Typhoon Morakot that led to forced evacuation from our native tribes, we have been at a loss, unable to adapt to our relocated life in the resettlement centers and the permanent housing estates on the Makazayazaya Farm. What uses does it have to live in permanent housing without any lands? Our ancestral lands abound in rice, and the mountain winds are imbued with fragrance.

“The Fragrant Mountain Winds” refers to the lives of the tribespeople who survived the disaster. The havoc wreaked by Typhoon Morakot posed the greatest challenge in centuries upon the Tavadran (Dashe) tribe in Sandimen Township, Pingtung County. Having endured a long migration from their ancestral lands in the mountains, across Ailiao River, to the so-called permanent housing on the Makazayazaya Farm, the indigenous communities struggle to adapt to their new life in resettlement. They learn to cope with displacement, adjustment, and the reconstruction of their souls and spirits amidst changes in their living space and surrounding environment. Since Typhoon Morakot struck, the people of the Tavadran tribe have been confronted with a deep sense of unease and resignation triggered by migration, adjustment, and the loss of roots and lands. After they relocated to resettlement camps and permanent housing, someone in the tribe passed away almost every month. Some tribal elders explained, “our spirits reside in the mountains, so we have to return to the ancestral lands,” expressing their profound attachment to and nostalgia for their

montane native lands. “The Fragrant Mountain Winds” strives to pass on the unique resilience and optimism of the indigenous peoples in the face of disasters and migration over the centuries. Through the eyes, words, and wisdom of the elders, it seeks to manifest the soul and spirit of their homeland, while conveying their strength and dreams of rebuilding a new home.

Etan Pavavalung

Etan Pavavalung, Paiwan artist was born into the Tavadran tribe of Dashe village, Sandimen town in Pingtung County in Taiwan. He grew up in the renowned Pulima artisan family and was immersed in Paiwan life where traditional arts and culture are showcased everywhere. This environment would also set the tone for his future art creations. When studying at the Yushan Theological College and Seminary and the Tainan Theological College and Seminary, Etan was inspired to contemplate on philosophy and religious art. Besides writing poems and prose, he is also the director of several documentaries excelling at imagery poetry. Moreover, Etan has also been learning and keeping records on the Paiwanese mouth-blown and nose flutes, which led to the Ministry of Culture designating him as a cultural ambassador of the traditional performing arts. His innovative art form, “Trace Layer Carve Paint,” has become the signature feature of his artwork. Etan’s creative art is deeply embedded in his subjectivity about his Indigenous culture and his reflections on society and the ecosystem. During the “Return Our Lands” and “Regain Our Names” Indigenous movements in the 1990s, Etan took the lily flower, the token of his tribe’s spirit, and started represented the lily on posters and T-shirts in the hope of strengthening identity. He now excels at presenting the multiple cultural imagery and depictions of the Indigenous Taiwan lily. Through personified visual movements, he creates harmony between humanity and the natural ecosystem. The aesthetic concept behind his mother culture, “Vecik” (lines, patterns, and words), nourishes his exploration in arts performance. In 2009, Etan took gravers to be his pens and wood board as his canvas and created “Trace Layer Carve Paint” as his anchor in terms of technique and form in the visual arts. “Trace Layer Carve Paint” shows the “trace” that the creator leaves on nature and the earth, and the civilized texture that is piled up in the “layers” of Aboriginal stone slab houses in Taiwan. Etan “carves” down deep into the cultural spirit, “paints” and widens artistic possibilities.

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