

HERO - Higher Education & Research Opportunities in the UK. (2001). *Higher Education & Research Opportunities in the UK: RAE 2001: Results*. Retrieved: March 29, 2004 from the HERO website:
<http://www.hero.ac.uk/rae/Results/>

Jefferson, T. I., & Nagy, T. J. (2002). A domain-driven approach to improving search effectiveness in traditional online catalogs. *Information & Management*, 39(7), 559-570. Retrieved December 20, 2004 from ScienceDirect database.

Mann, T. (1993). *Library research models : a guide to classification, cataloging, and computers*. New York : Oxford University Press.

Massey University Training and Development Unit. (2003). *Research management skills programme*. Retrieved January 20, 2004 from the TDU website:
<http://tdu.massey.ac.nz/html/research-skills-frame.html>

McMillan, V. (2003 July). Tertiary sector is tested to prove research strengths. *The Independent*.

Owusu-Ansah, E. K. (2004). Information Literacy and Higher Education: Placing the Academic Library in the Center of a Comprehensive Solution. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 30(1), 3-16.

Smith, E. M. (2003). Developing an information skills curriculum for the sciences. *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, 37, Retrieved January 22, 2004 from, <http://www.istl.org/03-spring/article8.html>.

Stoan, S. K. (1984). Research and library Skills - an analysis and interpretation. *College & Research Libraries*, 45(2), 99-109.

University of Sheffield, S. D. U. (2002). *Research Support Topics*. Retrieved March 29, 2004 from the University of Sheffield website:
<http://www.shef.ac.uk/stdu/Research/resbrochure.html>

THE WORK OF THE EDUCATOR IN PROMOTING PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION IN LIFELONG LEARNING

Julie Willans
Central Queensland University

ABSTRACT

This paper intends to present a glimpse into the work of the educator in promoting Mezirow's (2000) perspective transformation as lifelong learning within a pre-undergraduate program that is designed to challenge and change the worldviews of learners seeking entrance to university.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings hold and express many and varied perspectives and worldviews, formed as a lifelong practice and impacted on by multiple sources, including customs, traditions, upbringing, values, beliefs, assumptions, experiences personality traits, learning styles, and societal norms (Mezirow, 2000). These sources overlap to create the lens through which individuals view the world, how they express opinions, how they act and react to events and occurrences, how they judge others, and how they live their lives. Throughout the process of life, such worldviews or perspectives may change. Having those views challenged or changed by considering alternative or other worldviews can be a valuable part of lifelong learning, as one broadens one's perspectives, questions taken-for-granted situations, and takes some time to reflect critically on why things are as they are. As a result of this process, perspectives can be transformed. The *Language and Learning* course of the enabling program

STEPS (Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies) at Central Queensland University is a course that challenges its mature age learners to reflect on their long-held individual perspectives and viewpoints, contemplate how these may have been shaped, and become capable of accepting the worldviews of others. This process could well be viewed as an integral and vital part of lifelong learning.

This paper begins by presenting an overview of lifelong learning in today's contemporary context, and alludes to the elusiveness of the sometimes overused and misinterpreted term "lifelong learning"; a term that is undergoing clarification and redefinition in times of great change. A description of who the STEPS students are is offered, followed by descriptions of elements considered to be essential for the educator; namely, adult learning principles and transformative learning. Perspective transformation is discussed, the phases of which reflect the journey some learners engaged in the

Language and Learning course undergo as the course proceeds. Set in the context of higher education – or, more specifically, within a writing course of an enabling program designed as a pathway for mature-age learners to embark on tertiary education – this paper provides glimpses of the roles that educators within the *Language and Learning* course must play in promoting perspective transformation and lifelong learning. It concludes with the recommendation that perspective transformation be considered as an integral part of lifelong learning.

LIFELONG LEARNING

A definition of the term “lifelong learning” is somewhat elusive. Bennetts (2003, p. 457) emphasises the difficulty of defining such a term and acknowledges that “the concept of lifelong learning remains open to multiple definitions and interpretations”. A definition for lifelong learning in Australia has been cited by International Insight (2002) as “the process of acquiring knowledge or skills throughout life through education, training, work and general life experiences”. The Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development (2001) likens lifelong learning to a journey to be travelled, one that is about not just reaching the destination, but also how the journey is travelled; According to the centre, lifelong learning is “essential for all, as a cradle-to-grave process which involves the continuous development, acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, values and wisdom across the lifespan” (p. 1). There is little doubt that, as we travel the journey of life, we constantly engage in the lifelong process of learning. As Carneiro (2000, p. 30) notes, “humans have been designed for learning” and have been engaged in that process since the first humans roamed the earth and survived on senses and instincts. Thus, lifelong learning is a continual process, spontaneous and contrived, formal and informal, and defies a definitive description.

In some ways the term “lifelong learning” has become a hackneyed phrase of our times, permeating corporate, institutional, government, and workplace vision and mission statements and pertaining to various modes of learning. However, where lifelong learning may once have been viewed as a more personal, informal recreational or educational pursuit, the notion of lifelong learning has changed from its more humanistic traditions to become a much wider

concept impacted upon by a combination of aspects of economic, employment, social, cultural, and educational objectives (Adult Learning Australia, 1999). Rapid changes within our contemporary era are exemplified by great transformations in many facets of modern life, and lifelong learning is one such area undergoing great redefinition. Australia is no longer an industrial society of the modernist era, and the dictates of the knowledge- and information-based society are calling for its citizenry to “develop skills that are relevant to their own needs and to those of employers, professional associations, labour markets and society” (Department of Education, Science, and Training, 2003, p. 11). Lifelong learning has never been more important.

In our rapidly globalizing world, knowledge and learning are considered to be valuable attributes, with the acquisition of both being actively encouraged. Van Huren and Henning (1998, p. 2) contend that citizens of our contemporary times need to be lifelong learners if they are to keep up with rapidly changing demands of a more globalized world in which knowledge is commodified as a saleable product. With regards to the Australian context, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (2000, p.1) sees it as vital that citizens have the “opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to prosper in a high technology world”. Thus, for many citizens, lifelong learning is necessary for ensuring inclusion and retention in the workplace. This is evidenced by unprecedented numbers of adults entering the realm of higher education in the pursuit of university qualifications. Once the exclusive domain of the elite and younger adults, higher education and opportunities for more formal lifelong learning are becoming far more available to the masses. This worldwide trend is seeing many citizens embark on higher education with the intention of acquiring the necessary qualifications for entry into the knowledge society’s workforce. Furthermore, through Australian federal government initiatives that continue to channel financial assistance into university preparatory programs, higher-education numbers have increased significantly. Figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2002, p. 2) indicate that “between 1990 and 2000 the total number of higher-education students rose by 69%”. This clearly illustrates the value and priority that is being placed on the acquisition of knowledge and lifelong-learning skills.

It would seem that lifelong learning is taking on a whole new meaning for many citizens. Large numbers of mature-age learners are finding themselves back in formal learning situations after many years of being away from such environments, and studying with fellow students at least half their ages. Many cultures, backgrounds, races, religions, languages, and motivations combine to create unique higher-education learning contexts and, with the excitement such diversity can bring, so too can confusion, conflict, and anxiety occur. And a certainty for many is that change will occur; for, as Brookfield (1987, p. 51) attests, “if one feature in our society appears to hold constant, it is the certainty of change”. For some, change may be unwelcome, unsettling, and unwanted but for many it can be enlightening, liberating, and exciting, and great transformations in perspectives may take place. Well informed educators with a strong belief in the power of transformation thus have a vital role to play in facilitating, mentoring, guiding, encouraging, challenging, and celebrating the lifelong-learning process of the learners with whom they interact. The work of the educator in the *Language and Learning* course of the STEPS program is an example of this, as the educator challenges the perspectives and worldviews held by learners, and actively promotes perspective transformation.

WHO ARE THE STEPS STUDENTS?

STEPS students are those aged nineteen and over who wish to embark on higher education and choose an enabling program to equip them with the skills and expertise to do so. Coming from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds, the learners represent a broad spectrum of society. Such an audience brings with it an array of life experiences, prior learning, biases, opinions, ideas, feelings, disappointments, aspirations, beliefs, motivation levels, and expectations. For some, STEPS is a revelation of another way of thinking, and thus it opens up many possibilities; for others it is a corridor to further hopes and dreams; and for some it is an experiment or a means to an end – merely a litmus test for the rigors of university study. Regardless of motive, many STEPS learners can be viewed as border crossers (Giroux, 1992) because they cross the boundary with stories from the sometimes negative learning environments they have encountered in the past. Many speak of unhappy or unfulfilled experiences within the primary and secondary

schooling systems; others speak of economic and social barriers of the past that precluded their entry to university; others state how their lack of academic qualifications has prompted them to seek university qualifications in the hope of a better life for themselves and their families. Some, however, may come to the program because of great disruption in their personal lives – due to, for example, termination of employment, changes or turmoil in personal relationships, or the need for new direction. Most are ready to enact some change in their lives and are motivated to do so.

By virtue of years lived and prior life experiences and learning, STEPS students arrive with their individually shaped and entrenched perspectives and worldviews. Most learners begin the *Language and Learning* course with interesting, amazing, heart-wrenching, insightful, and rich stories, yet many display varying levels of naivety, ignorance, and prejudice and, sometimes, very narrow-minded and ill-informed views. Many have acquired valuable life skills that have held them in good stead, whilst others arrive with stories of past failures that have impinged quite dramatically on their self-confidence, personal growth, and ability to accept viewpoints other than their own. A large percentage of learners express apprehension about entering the realms of formal learning after varying degrees of time away from such structures, and the notion of embarking on higher education can be extremely intimidating. Support from families and friends is strong for some learners, but non-existent for others. The myriad of individual differences and worldviews held by the STEPS learners conspires to make for very interesting and challenging work for the educator. Paramount in the effectiveness of the work of the educator is a thorough comprehension of, and strong advocacy for, adult learning principles and transformative learning.

ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES

The role of the educator in promoting perspective transformation as lifelong learning entails a strong adherence to adult learning principles (Foley, 2000; Knowles, 1998; Merriam & Cafarella, 1999). According to Foley (2000, p. 47) adult learning principles are shaped by both humanistic and cognitive psychology and “are principles to guide adult educators when they work with learners”. As well as effective and satisfying learning and

teaching principles, Foley (2000) believes them to be “just as much statements of the value positions of particular adult educators” (p. 48). However, these principles are based on the premise that adult learners should be presented with learning experiences that are relevant to their past and present life experiences and should be related to current concerns and experiences. Thus, educators value and build on students’ prior knowledge and experiences and consider individual characteristics, interests, and learning styles in the design of learning activities. Central Queensland University (2002, p. iii) notes the importance of this when it acknowledges that “STEPS students come with a wealth of life experiences, ideas and feelings and their learning experiences will be varied according to the different learning environments they have encountered”. Educators must also remember that many adult learners have family, work, and other commitments; engagements the educator must be ever aware of and sensitive to in planning, delivering, assigning, and assessing learning experiences.

Adult learners need to see purpose and directions for their educational pursuits. Knowles (1998, p. 151) describes the adults learners’ need to know how their learning will be conducted, what exactly will be learned, and why such knowledge will be valuable. These needs are said to affect motivation to learn, learning outcome, and the propensity to use learning in the future. Brookfield (1986, as cited in Foley, 2000, p. 48) lists the six important principles of adult learning as “voluntary participation, mutual respect, collaborative spirit, action and reflection, critical reflection and self direction”. Adherence to these adult-learning principles, especially critical reflection, is an integral element of transformative learning and perspective transformation.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING AND PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

Transformative learning is learning that actively promotes and seeks to cause perspective transformation in the individual learner. Mezirow, considered by Merriam and Cafarella (1999, p. 319) to be the “primary architect and spokesperson” of transformative learning over the last two decades, describes perspective transformation as learning that seeks to help adult learners transform their ways of thinking about themselves and their world (Mezirow, 2000). He believes learning to occur in one of

four ways: “by elaborating existing frames of reference, by learning new frames of reference, by transforming points of view, or by transforming habits of mind” (p. 19). Perspective transformation can be immediate or occur over time, and Mezirow (2000, p. 22) is the first to acknowledge that not all learning is transformative. He believes perspective transformation follows a series of phases, often beginning with a disorienting dilemma that confuses or perplexes the worldview of the learner. This takes the learner on a journey of self-examination and reflection to explore and adopt new actions and, when internalised by the individual, can result in transformed perspectives. However, Merriam and Cafarella (1999, p. 333) question the necessity of the disorienting dilemma as a trigger for transformative learning and highlight the problematic issues of transformative learning theory as “the extent to which the theory takes context into account; whether the theory relies too heavily on rationality; the place of social action; and the educator’s role in facilitating transformative learning”.

Critical reflection is an inextricable facet of perspective transformation and involves critical self-reflection and reflection on discourse and practices. Brookfield (1995, pp. 26-27) applauds the value of critical reflection, believing the ideological concept to “enliven our classrooms...increase democratic trust...[and] ground us emotionally”. To Brookfield (2002, p. 125), critical reflection involves the engagement of the individual in some sort of power analysis of the situation or context in which learning is happening, and the examination of hegemonic assumptions that serve the interests of others. Perspective transformation, defined by Cranton (personal communication, November 5, 2003) as “an individual’s revision of a meaning perspective or a worldview as a result of critical self-reflection”, cannot occur without critical reflection. Critical reflection, however, can occur without an accompanying transformation in perspective. As Brookfield (2002, p. 125) notes, “although critical reflection is an ineradicable element of transformative learning, it is not a synonym for it”. The role of the educator in an educational curriculum that espouses transformation of perspectives is thus a vital one because the educator actively models, encourages, and promotes critical reflective practices.

WORK OF THE EDUCATOR IN THE LANGUAGE AND LEARNING COURSE

The thirteen or twenty-six week STEPS program is designed as a pathway for mature-age students to higher education. Language and Learning is a writing course, and represents one of four courses undertaken in the program. Many of the writing strategies used are designed to encourage students to express themselves in both the written and spoken word, one objective being to gain a greater understanding of the self and the forces that have shaped individual worldviews. The aim of the educator is to help learners understand the influences of personal attitudes and beliefs on individual worldviews and how worldviews and perspectives can change and impact on others. Learners are encouraged to record and discuss the changes that may be occurring in their perspectives as they are challenged and confronted by issues in the curriculum. From the very outset of the course the educator encourages learners to use reflections in personal journals as the impetus for writing and discussion. Educators actively promote, provoke, and facilitate discussion and encourage the sharing of learners' stories, worldviews, and experiences through discussion groups, learning circles, and tutorials. They challenge learners to reflect on and write about how their own personal worldviews have been formed and continue to be shaped. The educator then encourages learners to link such insights about personal worldviews, and to apply them to the analysis of broader contemporary societal issues. Such insights, however, can be unsettling and confrontational and may engage the learner in some angst and consternation as change occurs. Assurance, encouragement, and support are offered by the educators, alongside constructive feedback and technical help, as is strong support from the peer group.

Due to its focus on change, the *Language and Learning* curriculum can create what Mezirow (2000, p. 22) refers to as disorienting dilemmas, whereby long-held worldviews are in some way unsettled and challenged. Conflict amongst learners inevitably occurs as learners proclaim their personal worldviews and opinions. Heated discussions, agitated learners, and raised voices are all part of the environment as issues are debated, challenged, and analysed. The work of the educator is to judiciously lead conversation and discussion in the classroom situation, ensuring that all those wishing to voice an opinion may do so in a non-threatening

environment. The educator must insist that learners listen to and respect the worldviews of others even though they may not hold the same perspectives. Avenues other than verbal contributions must be made available for those wishing to express their opinions, and all opinions must be listened to with positive feedback given as often as possible. The educator must also be the adversary of oppressive behaviour (Foley, 2000) and reassure learners who are confronting change.

Just as the work of the educator can be quite demanding and challenging as learners deal with change, such work is not without its rewards and gratifications for both educator and learner. Disorienting dilemmas that occur in the personal lives of the learner can set a powerful chain of events in place that can be transformative and eventuate in new-found release from unfulfilled lives. As learners progress through the phases suggested by Mezirow (2000), many accommodate new perspectives to their existing schemas and look at life through a different lens. The suppressed woman who suddenly realises her life can be so different no longer tolerates a minoritised, downtrodden life, and determines that she can pursue her dreams. The retrenched male with financial and other responsibilities suddenly realises his life can be quite different from that expected of him by family and others, and recognises that there are other paths in life he can take. Such changes in perspective according to Merriam and Cafarella (1999, p. 320) are "personally emancipating in that one is freed from previously held beliefs, attitudes, values and feelings that have constricted and distorted one's life".

The educator's work is to support and encourage learners as they embrace change, and also celebrate special moments. The "ah-hah" moments, when one observes or hears manifestations of the learner's transformed views, are very special for the educator. Comments made by learners, such as "I've never considered it like that before", accompanied by expressions of wonder and revelation are the rewards the educator celebrates. Educators also share many exciting moments as they journey with their learners, witnessing personal achievements and transformations of many learners and the impacts these changes can have. As Clarke (as cited in Merriam & Cafarella, 1999, p. 318) says, real changes can occur, for "transformational learning shapes people; they

are different afterward, in ways both they and others can recognise”.

Perhaps one of the most powerful outcomes of transformative learning is the transformation of educators, who cannot help but be included as they work side by side with transformed learners. Qualities of compassion, humility, and empathy can be greatly enhanced as educators work with learners who have stepped out from worlds of discontent and confronted many hurdles and obstacles placed in their way. Despite these setbacks, many learners tenaciously progress through the course, often learning more about themselves than the rudiments of the academic essay. Many of their strengths lie in the prior learning and life experiences they attest to, manifested in the rich stories many tell. Educators can learn from such stories and experiences, and their own process of perspective transformation can be enhanced. They cannot help but be inspired as they encourage and understand their learners, as well as collaborate and celebrate with them as they travel together on the path of lifelong learning.

CONCLUSION

The work of the educator in promoting perspective transformation in lifelong learning is both challenging and rewarding in the current climate of rapid technological change. A greater diversity of mature-age learners seeking entrance to the realm of higher education calls for educators in preparatory programs to adhere closely to adult-learning principles. Calculated measures of provocation, questioning, and challenging are essential for the educator when engaged with learners in a transformative learning course such as the *Language and Learning* course of the STEPS program. Through the promotion of critical reflection, new perspectives and revised worldviews can be acquired. This is a valuable lifelong-learning skill whereby citizens learn to ask questions and seek answers of systems of which they are a part. The work of the educator is important in both practising and promoting lifelong-learning skills in learners; skills that can stay with those learners throughout university and accompany them on the journey of life.

REFERENCES

- Adult Learning Australia. (1999). *Introduction to the national seminar on lifelong learning*. Retrieved January 14, 2004 from, <http://www.ala.asn.au/lll/tbLLL.htm>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2002). *Year book Australia 2002*, 'Education and training higher education'. Retrieved January 7, 2003 from, www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@nsf/94713ad445ff1425ca25
- Bennetts, C. (2003). The impact of transformational learning on individuals, families and communities. *International Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 22(5), (457-480).
- Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Brookfield, S. D. (2002). Overcoming alienation as the practice of adult education: The contribution of Erich Fromm to a critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(2), (96-111). Retrieved December 3, 2002 from, the Proquest database.
- Carneiro, R. (2000). The quest for a new learning paradigm. *Unicorn*, 26(3), 26-33.
- Central Queensland University. (2002). *STEPS Language and learning – Immigrants into a new time*. Rockhampton, Queensland: Learning Support, Division of Teaching and Learning.
- Centre for Lifelong Learning and Development, (2001). *Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved January 19, 2004 from, www.centreforlifelonglearning.org.au/ll.html
- Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training. (2000). *Student statistics*. Retrieved August 13, 2003 from, <http://www.dest.gov.au/initiatlas/postcodes/4701.htm>
- Department of Education, Science and Training. (2003). *Our universities – backing Australia's future*. Canberra, ACT: Author.
- Foley, G. (2000). *Understanding adult education and training* (2nd ed.). Crow's Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Giroux, H. A. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. New York: Routledge.
- International Insight. (2002). *Lifelong learning underpins economic growth*. Retrieved January 2, 2003 from, www.ncver.edu.au/articles/insight/issue7/lifelong.htm
- Knowles, M. (1998). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (5th ed.). Houston, TX: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Merriam, S., & Cafarella, R. (1999). *Learning in adulthood – a comprehensive guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Mezirow, J. (2000). Learning to think like an adult – core concepts of transformation theory. In J. Mezirow and Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 3-31). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Van Vuren, A., & Henning, J. (1998). User-education in a flexible learning environment – An opportunity to stay relevant in the 21st century. Retrieved May 13, 2003 from, <http://educate.lib.chalmers.se/IATUL/proceedcontents/pretpap/vur...>