

## TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN TEACHING ADULTS FOREIGN LANGUAGES

*The article is devoted to the theory of transformative learning in regard to teaching adults foreign languages and within the framework of continuing education under modern conditions. It is stated that transformative learning theory considers the process of "perspective transformation" as having three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle). Transformative learning refers to those learning experiences that cause a shift in an individual's perspective. The main concepts and strategies of transformative learning are discussed; the notions of heutagogy and personalization are outlined. It was found that heutagogy is most commonly understood as the strategy of self-determined learning, while personalization in the context of transformative learning is seen as applying different approaches to different learners depending on their strengths and interests while achieving a common goal. The conditions of cognitive perspective transformation are described. The ways of fostering transformative learning, such as relationships, critical reflection, direct and active experience, discourse, and their possible implementation in teaching adults foreign languages are proposed including specific techniques and methods. The article considers the roles of educator, which is considered as a "delicate mediator", and student as a socially active critical agent of the learning process and the essence of knowledge and its achievement from the point of view of transformative learning. It is argued that knowledge is in deep connections with social, cultural, historical and psychological context; the learners achieve a self-developing system and are engaged in social and intellectual interaction.*

**Key words:** transformative learning, heutagogy, personalization, teaching adults, continuing education.

### *Статтю подано мовою оригіналу*

In modern conditions continuing education becomes a necessary self-development tool, career building instrument, and a philosophy. In our rapidly developing globalized world it even becomes a factor of professional survival. It goes out of saying that speaking foreign languages for professionals of any domain is a prerequisite.

Teaching adults foreign languages can become a challenging experience for any teacher as this field is still understudied, it has not well-established methodological base. The objective of this work is to consider the theory of transformative learning and its strategies in view of their application in teaching adults foreign languages.

*Transformative or transformational learning* is now one of the dominant theories in the world of adult learning even though it was introduced decades ago. Jack Mezirow's empirical work in the 70s and his major theoretical statement in 1981 showed great promise for creating a critical theory of adult learning: "This article represents the beginnings of a critical theory of adult learning" [6, p. 3], which he argued would provide "the foundation for formulating a comprehensive theory of adult education" [6, p. 16]. Mezirow was the first in American adult education to use the critical theories of Jurgen Habermas and Paulo Freire [1] to promote critical reflection as central to transforming our learning from experience. Mezirow's thinking provided a significant challenge to academic orthodoxy by making the central task of adult education the critique of assumptions through critically reflective learning. His theoretical proposals, at the time tagged to andragogy, actually initiated a series of attacks on the "andragogical consensus". Since then, critical theory (that of Mezirow and others) has contributed to revealing and widening the gap between the neutered and neutralizing professionalization of academic adult education represented by the andragogical consensus and the more serious questions that began appearing in the 70s about what the real purpose of adult education should be.

Transformative learning theory says that the process of "perspective transformation" has three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioral (changes in lifestyle). Transformative learning refers to those learning experiences that cause a shift in an individual's perspective. It is based on the idea that learning is "the process of making a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience" [7, p. 90]. This happens when adult learners change their assumptions or expectations. What often follows is a change in their frame of reference for interpretation and understanding. Often transformative learning is a result of a life change, occurrence of a complex problem or dilemma, dramatic events. A perspective transformation leading to transformative learning, however, occurs much less frequently. Mezirow believes that this less frequent transformation usually results from a "disorienting dilemma", which is triggered by a life crisis or major life transition, although it may also result from an accumulation of transformations in meaning schemes over a period of time. The perspective is explained by Mezirow as follows: 1) disorienting dilemma; 2) self-examination; 3) sense of alienation; 4) relating discontent to others; 5) explaining options of new behavior; 6) building confidence in new ways; 7) planning a course of action; 8) knowledge to implement plans; 9) experimenting with new roles; 10) reintegration [6].

One of the most essential features of transformative learning is the role of learners. They must create norms within the classroom that include civility, respect, and responsibility for helping one another learn. Learners must welcome diversity within the learning environment and aim for peer collaboration. Learners must become critical of their own assumptions in order to transform their unquestioned frame of reference. Through communicative learning, learners must work towards critically reflecting on assumptions that underlie intentions, values, beliefs, and feelings. Learners are involved in objective re-framing of their frames of reference when they critically reflect

on the assumptions of others. In contrast, subjective re-framing occurs when learners critically assess their own assumptions. The role of the learner involves actively participating in discourse. Through discourse, learners are able to validate what is being communicated to them. This dialogue provides the opportunity to critically examine evidence, arguments, and alternate points of view, which fosters collaborative learning. Two main strategies were outlined in within transformative learning. They are described as follows:

The first of the concepts that is transforming learning has an alien-sounding name: heutagogy. This is a term that originated in the 1990s with Stewart Hase and Chris Kenyon at Southern Cross University in Australia. The term is new, but it describes a very old human learning strategy. Hase and Kenyon define it as “the study of self-determined learning” or “the strategy of self-determined learning.” Most significantly, according to Hase and Kenyon, “Heutagogy looks to the future in which knowing how to learn will be a fundamental skill given the pace of innovation and the changing structure of communities and workplaces” [3, p. 3]. Heutagogy is a kind of complement to two earlier concepts, pedagogy (a strategy for teaching children) and andragogy (a strategy for teaching adults). The key difference is that heutagogy is self-determined strategy – an instructor, teacher, or other arbiter is not necessarily involved, unless the individual chooses to involve one at some point. It is important to think of it as self-determined learning, not “informal learning” as contrasted to “formal learning.” It is also important to reflect on the fact that everyone with access to the Internet has, to one extent or another, already adopted heutagogy as a key part of their personal learning strategy. Before the Internet, for that matter, anyone with access to a library, a newspaper, a correspondence school catalog, or a social network did the same thing. Heutagogy is clearly a personal strategy of individuals [3].

The second concept, directly answering that question, is personalization. Personalization in the context of transformative learning is seen as applying different approaches to different learners depending on their strengths and interests while achieving a common goal. Dr. Yong Zhao, presidential chair and director of the Institute for Global and Online Education in the College of Education at the University of Oregon, makes a helpful differentiation between two types of personalization. Most educators, he says, think of personalization as a matter of personalizing the learning *process*. The destination (objective, competency, etc.) is set by the organization or institution, but the learner selects his or her individual path to it, using resources and guidance provided by the instructor or other support system. Zhao claims that this can actually improve learning. The other form of personalization goes beyond predefined curricula by allowing the learner to determine the *outcome* based on personal strengths and passions, using a path (or paths) of the learner’s choosing. Dr. Zhao believes that this approach may better prepare the learner for the future, and also addresses the question of “learning how to learn” [10].

These two concepts form the basis for successful adult teaching. When we focus on studying foreign languages, some particularities in implementing these strategies should be considered. The first is the impossibility to eliminate the key role of an educator as the essence of studying foreign languages presupposes the limits to such elimination. In this regard the only possible way is to make this role less influential, the personality of a teacher being very delicate and friendly. It is necessary to avoid strict hierarchical relationships “teacher-learners” by replacing them with open, free and friendly environment. Transformative learning cannot be guaranteed. Teachers can only provide an opportunity to transformatively learn. In order to foster transformative learning, the educator’s role is to assist learners in becoming aware and critical of assumptions. This includes their own assumptions that lead to their interpretations, beliefs, habits of mind, or points of view, as well as the assumptions of others. Educators must provide learners practice in recognizing frames of reference. By doing so, educators encourage practice in redefining problems from different perspectives. The goal is to create a community of learners who are united in a shared experience of trying to make meaning of their life experience. Only in this case the above mentioned strategies can be successfully implemented.

In a research review, Taylor described some factors that were shown to foster transformational learning. In addition, Henderson outlines ways to foster transformative learning.

**Relationships.** Several studies showed that transformative learning is fostered by establishing supportive and trusting relationships. This is the basis for dialogue and discourse. Building relationships requires a learning climate that is open to differing perspectives and is non-hierarchical in nature. Online, trusting relationships are easier to build in virtual classroom or work group situations when participants can see each other through photos or video, when learners can hear the voice of the moderator or instructor and when they share a common goal [8, p. 176].

**Critical Reflection.** Transformative learning often goes hand in hand with self-reflection. This involves challenging the assumptions people rely on to understand the world. For example, you can foster transformative learning by asking open-ended questions that help learners relate new knowledge to their own life experiences. Probing questions that promote critical reflection have no easy or simple answer. You can design critical reflection into formal courses by asking participants to respond to questions through blogging and other internal social tools. It can also be part of thoughtful online discussions [2].

**Direct and Active Experience.** In his research review, Taylor found that one of the most powerful ways to foster transformative learning is by offering direct experiences that are meaningful to learners. In one example, doctors and nurses studying palliative care were required to visit hospices, funeral homes and anatomy labs. This idea can be transferred to workplace learning by initiating programs that encourage direct experience. For example, employees who wish to develop leadership ability could initiate a socially beneficial campaign to lead in the workplace

[8, p. 177]. In applying this strategy to teaching foreign languages it is appropriate to use the method of case study; implementation of discussion clubs with native speakers, blogs and social networks.

Readiness for the Transformative Experience. Another factor that encourages transformative learning is an individual's self-awareness and readiness for the experience. A few studies showed that individuals who were in a transitional mindset were likely to experience a transformation. They may have been in the midst of a dilemma or at the limits of their ability to create meaning with their current level of knowledge. The implication being that it is important to help learners develop the type of self-awareness and acceptance of discomfort in order to allow a transformation to occur. Speaking about adult learners, the main thing the educator must constantly keep in mind is delicacy. Students generally come to the classroom as representatives of different social layers, systems of views, religions, etc. With the help of a wise teacher they need to merge all this in something new, to undertake transformation on the way to new skills and knowledge, they need to become new community under new conditions [8, p. 189].

Discourse. Henderson points out how discussion is a critical aspect of transformative learning and that there are benefits to doing this online. First, some adults are more comfortable speaking online than in person, so they will be more engaged. Also, online discussions are flexible in mode. They may take place asynchronously in forums, so participants have time to think through their responses or they may take place synchronously in chat rooms. In addition, online discussions occur naturally when small groups tackle problems and issues [2, p. 6]. An interesting method, not very widely used in Ukraine, corresponding to the above mentioned strategies is creating and editing a group blog in a foreign language devoted to a social, cultural or environmental problem. The process of its editing can foster transformative learning by creating a socially active and united community of students with socially active position.

On the basis of the foregoing, we can draw the following **conclusions**:

1. Transformative learning and its methodological base can be successfully applied for adult students studying foreign languages, as this theory corresponds to psychological peculiarities of adults and can help avoiding numerous problems that are often faced by teachers.

2. Transformative learning regards a person as an active participant of educational process, making him or her part of a purpose-oriented, united community where a personality, still being unique and independent, transforms to an active knowledge achiever.

3. Knowledge in transformative learning is not a set of rules or vocabulary units, it is presented as "thick description" in deep connections with social, cultural, historical and psychological context; the learners achieve not dry facts, but a self-developing system, they develop the ability to learn and are engaged in social interaction.

4. The role of teacher can be described as a "delicate mediator" and requires constant improvement and self-reflection.

5. Teaching methods within transformative learning can be diverse, but they must be strictly based on concepts of heutagogy and personalization. They may involve various discussion clubs, on-line techniques, forums, social researches, surveys, case-study, portfolios and even social experiments – everything that can provoke transformation in all cognitive aspects of a person.

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#### **Гончарова-Львіна Т. О. Стратегії трансформаційного навчання в навчанні дорослих іноземної мови**

*Стаття присвячена теорії трансформаційного навчання щодо навчання дорослих іноземних мов у рамках безперервної освіти в сучасних умовах. Стверджується, що теорія трансформаційного навчання розглядає процес «перспективної трансформації» як такий, що має три виміри: психологічний (зміни в розумінні себе), сфери переконань (перегляд систем переконань) і поведінковий (зміни в способі життя). Трансформативне навчання належить до тих навчальних переживань, які викликають зрушення в перспективі особистості. Обговорюються основні концепції і стратегії трансформаційного навчання; викладені поняття хьютагогії і персоналізації. Встановлено, що хьютагогіка найбільш часто розуміється як стратегія навчання, що самовизначається, тоді як персоналізація в контексті трансформаційного навчання розглядається як застосування різних підходів до різних учнів залежно від їхніх силь-*

них сторін та інтересів у процесі досягнення спільної мети. Описано умови трансформації когнітивної перспективи. Пропонуються способи стимулювання трансформаційного навчання, як-от відносини, критична рефлексія, прямий і активний досвід, дискурс, та їх можлива реалізація в навчанні дорослих іноземним мовам, зокрема, конкретні методи. У статті розглядаються роль педагога, який визначається як «делікатний посередник», а учень описується як соціально активний критичний учасник навчального процесу, а також сутність знання і його досягнення з погляду трансформаційного навчання. Стверджується, що знання пов'язані із соціальним, культурним, історичним і психологічним контекстом; учні освоюють систему, що розвивається сама, і беруть участь у соціальній та інтелектуальній взаємодії.

**Ключові слова:** трансформаційне навчання, хьютагогіка, персоналізація, навчання дорослих, безперервна освіта.

**Гончарова-Ильина Т. А. Стратегии трансформационного обучения в обучении взрослых иностранным языкам**

Статья посвящена теории трансформационного обучения относительно обучения взрослых иностранным языкам и в рамках непрерывного образования в современных условиях. Утверждается, что теория трансформационного обучения рассматривает процесс «перспективной трансформации» как имеющий три измерения: психологическое (изменения в понимании себя), сферы убеждений (пересмотр систем убеждений) и поведенческое (изменения в образе жизни). Трансформативное обучение относится к тем учебным переживаниям, которые вызывают сдвиг в перспективе личности. Обсуждаются основные концепции и стратегии трансформационного обучения; изложены понятия хьютагогика и персонализации. Установлено, что хьютагогика наиболее часто понимается как стратегия самоопределяемого обучения, в то время как персонализация в контексте трансформационного обучения рассматривается как применение разных подходов к разным учащимся в зависимости от их сильных сторон и интересов при достижении общей цели. Описаны условия трансформации когнитивной перспективы. Предлагаются такие способы стимулирования трансформационного обучения, как: отношения, критическая рефлексия, прямой и активный опыт, дискурс, и их возможная реализация в обучении взрослых иностранным языкам, включая конкретные методы. В статье рассматриваются роли педагога, который определяется в качестве «деликатного посредника», а учащийся описывается как социально активный критичный участник учебного процесса, а также сущность знания и его достижения с точки зрения трансформационного обучения. Утверждается, что знания связаны с социальным, культурным, историческим и психологическим контекстом; учащиеся осваивают саморазвивающуюся систему и участвуют в социальном и интеллектуальном взаимодействии.

**Ключевые слова:** трансформационное обучение, хьютагогика, персонализация, обучение взрослых, непрерывное образование.