

The Intersection of Transformative Learning and Human Education

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[Abstract] This conceptual study of the proposed intersection of transformative learning and human education entails a comparative analysis of certain convergences and divergences between Daisaku Ikeda's philosophy of human education and the transformative learning theories of Jack Mezirow, and the findings applied to the field of adult learning. It is argued that a combined application of these philosophies provides a more robust learning experience for adults. Specifically, this concept incorporates Mezirow's idea that adult learners view learning as an autonomous activity for the benefit of the learner and Ikeda's notion of education expanding adult learning from a self-directed, introspective process to one that is dialogic and will create a network of mutuality within society.

[Keywords] human education, Ikeda, Mezirow, transformative learning

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to introduce the philosophy of human education developed by Daisaku Ikeda into the transformative learning process of adults as defined by Jack Mezirow to explore the potential of a global societal impact of joining these seemingly paradoxical learning philosophies. Would this synergy be successful towards creating a global humanity that is better prepared to address the looming crises we as a society currently face? The merging of Ikeda's philosophy of human education with Mezirow's transformative learning theory will expand the idea of adult learning from a self-directed, introspective process into one that is dialogic and creates a network of mutuality within society. Through this merging of views on learning, educators of adult students can create an andragogy that will elicit the transformation of assumptions, values, perceptions, and habits of mind necessary for adult learners to focus on universal values and become vital global citizens to lead the way in building a resilient and sustainable society.

Key to this study is the converging and diverging thoughts relative to the learning process of adults and identification of opportunity areas to find meaning, to enhance one's existence, and contribute to the well-being of others in adult learning. Primary and secondary sources reviewed in this study focus on the area of Mezirow's transformative learning theory, Ikeda's development of his theory around human education, and value-creating education from a variety of scholarly opinions. An assessment of current literature introducing and applying Ikeda's human education theory has been undertaken and incorporated into Mezirow's transformative learning theory for comparison of techniques, goals, and desired outcomes. The study then conceptualizes the idea of transformative human education as a tool for enhancing current adult learning processes to achieve a meaningful education experience for adult learners.

Definitions

To properly assess the elements of both transformative learning and human education, it is important to understand the root of each philosophical perspective. Below are the definitions of transformative learning and human education utilized in this study.

Adult learning is grounded in several scholarly theories; however, this study focused on Jack Mezirow's idea of transformational learning. His theory holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is key to making meaning and consequently learning (Mezirow, 1997). Put simply transformative learning is the idea that learners who are getting new information are also evaluating their past ideas and understanding and are shifting their worldview through critical reflection. It goes beyond simply acquiring knowledge; rather, it explores the process by which learners find meaning in their lives and understanding.

Mezirow proposes four paths in the transformative adult learning process, which include (1) refining or elaborating our meaning schemes, (2) learning new meaning schemes, (3) transforming meaning schemes, (4) and transforming meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). Each path requires adult learners to call upon their own experiences and critically reflect on assumptions which impact their values and expectations.

Daisaku Ikeda, a Japanese philosopher, educator, and peacebuilder, has made a profound global impact on education and human lives through his scholarly publications, peace proposals to the United Nations, and dialogue with global leaders and scholars. When describing his educational philosophy, Ikeda frequently uses the concept of *ningen kyoiku* or *human education* in which he believes that people are shaped by people (Ikeda, 2006). He sees education as a uniquely human privilege and his philosophy of human education is centered on the notion that being human is an action, a continual process where the goal of education is the mutual growth of oneself and others (Goulah, 2020, Goulah, 2021b). The sharing of ideas, opinions, practices and beliefs is what strengthens the educational experience for adult learners and allows for the creation of human beings of strong character. There is no education without life-to-life interaction and encouragement, whether it be between teacher and student or student and student. People grow through their contact with other people. This educational approach has grown out of Ikeda's years of studying and incorporating Buddhist beliefs that encourage harmony with living beings, nature, and the universe to find meaning, enhance one's own existence and contribute to the well-being of others, or value creation (Ikeda, 1996, Goulah, 2021a, Rita, 2021). Ikeda sees value creation as one of the core philosophies of human education, and he asserts the goal of value creating education is to foster people of character who continuously work towards cultivating the best in themselves and others. Further, it reflects his core conviction that humans and nonhumans are intertwined, both needing each other to learn, grow and sustain life. Ikeda's approach to human education demands that we expand our scope of possibility in our life (Goulah, 2020) to foster global citizens who display wisdom, courage, and compassion.

At the heart of Ikeda's human education philosophy are four interlocking ideals: dialogue, value creation, global citizenship, and creative coexistence. The following will examine the convergence and divergence of these with Mezirow's paths of learning and highlight opportunities to expand adult learning andragogy to generate a deeper, more meaningful, valuable learning experience.

The Goal of Adult Education

Transformative learning has been a prominent theme in adult education since the 1960's. Initially developed by Jack Mezirow, it is based on the idea that it allows adult learners to focus on their individual transformation and move beyond the self-imposed assumptions, perspectives, judgments, and attitudes which impact one's thinking, feeling, and acting (Hoggan & Finnegan, 2023). Mezirow asserts that the goal of adult education is "to help the individual become a more

autonomous thinker by learning to negotiate his or her own values, meanings, and purposes rather than to uncritically act on those of others” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11). It is Mezirow’s goal in transformative learning for learners to utilize deliberation and critical thinking in order to move towards a more autonomous way of knowing. He believes that challenging domination, fighting for social justice, and breaking from current perspectives is an integral part of adult learning and transformation (Mezirow, 1997; Hoggan, et al., 2017).

Ikeda holds education in the highest regard, stating in his 2014 Peace Proposal that “education holds the key to the future not only of a nation but of all humanity” (2014, p.10). Ikeda’s human education theory takes Mezirow’s idea of transformation and provides adult learners ways to alter their perspectives and assumptions in a way that will encourage creative co-existence with nature and humanity. As Heffron (2022) notes, “Ikeda has written that ‘The ultimate goal of value-creating education is to foster people of character who continuously strive for the “greatest good” of peace, who are committed to protecting the sanctity of life and who are capable of creating value under even the most difficult circumstance’,” (p. 479). There is no better time to refocus the goal of adult education based on the ideals of Ikeda than during the current Anthropocene as it is the means for understanding ourselves and others in this ever-changing world. Given that our planet has been damaged by increased extreme climate changes, accelerated species extinctions, and food, energy, and health insecurities (Goulah, 2019), action needs to be taken in the andragogical approaches of educating adults to redirect learning outcomes and address these global issues. The unintended consequence of human choices has created a global predicament that will require people of character to stand up and demonstrate their value as global citizens to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management (Chakrabarty, 2009).

While Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and practical implications of his work have been addressed by more than a dozen books, hundreds of scholarly papers and presentations, and more than 150 dissertations, a critical reflection of this framework identifies a gap between the theory and practice of transformational learning (DeSapio, 2017). Mezirow propounds that the key to transformative learning lies in discourse, or dialogue, and acknowledges that it is through communication that the adult learner can redefine problems, validate positions, and become aware of other’s assumptions (Mezirow, 1997). It is the responsibility of the educator to provide opportunities within the learning process to allow for the shaping of perspectives, challenging of opinions, and formation of new ideas by both student and teacher. Mezirow offers suggestions to educators on how to create this learning atmosphere including reframing questions, role play, group projects, and simulations, yet they only address the learning process within a classroom setting. There are additional opportunities for continuing the learning process and Ikeda’s idea of value-creating education extends the notion of dialogue in education beyond classrooms to family gatherings, community seminars, and global conferences for a holistic learning experience to not only impact the internal transformative learning of the adult learner but allow for the creation of value in a global learning environment.

Mezirow’s goal in education for adult learners to transform their assumptions, viewpoints, and perspectives to become more autonomous thinkers, while Ikeda expands the goal of learning beyond the learner to incorporate the notion of creating value in learning for the individual as well as for society. His goal of creating value in learning and global citizenship through dialogue is the beginning of what Ikeda refers to as *human revolution* (Goulah, 2019). This also provides a philosophical framework to develop the context and support for individual adult learners to create global change on social, economic, political, cultural and technological platforms.

The Importance of Dialogue

In Mezirow's philosophy, dialogue within the self and with others is a key component of the transformative learning process as it is what promotes the critical reflection needed for transformation. Learning is not just the accumulation of information; rather, it is the incorporation of reflecting upon such information, as well as personal experiences, and behaviors. Dialogue with educators as well as among and within the students themselves allows for the questioning of assumptions, truths, and authenticities of what is being proposed, and encourages critical reflection to be played out leading to discovery and validation of new thoughts and learnings. Adult learners need to be an active part of their learning process and dialogue plays a key role in allowing the learner to be the subject, or owner of their education (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011; Vella, 2016) which leads to better engagement and transformative learning. Dialogue allows the adult learner to act via critical thinking, deductive reasoning, and analysis and reflection of what is being asserted in their education so as to question beliefs and assumptions and potentially transform habits of mind.

Ikeda similarly believes that dialogue is at the heart of his human education theory which ultimate goal is to become fully human. He states "We are not born human in any but a biological sense; we can only learn to know ourselves and others and thus be 'trained' in the ways of being human (Ikeda, 2008, p. 228). This is a consistent theme throughout his writings, university addresses and annual United Nations peace proposals. He identifies dialogue as the catalyst for creating value and igniting change in the thoughts and values of others. It is dialogue that connects human beings, builds bridges to understanding, and develops relationships. "Education, based on open dialogue, is far more than the mere transfer of information and knowledge; it enables us to rise above the confines of our parochial perspectives and passions" (Ikeda, 2008, p. 229)

By combining the importance of using dialogue as a learning tool both internally, as is done in transformative learning, and externally by engaging in conversation with others and search for value as Ikeda promotes, the opportunity for adult learners to create a *better* self and share with others will expand the circle of dialogue within a community. This will allow learners the ability to reach across social, economic, and ecological barriers (Ikeda, 2014) by sparking an open exchange of ideas and perspectives that deepens the understanding of these issues. Educators can help shape the learning dialogue in adult learning curricula to not only question and reflect on ideas, but to propel adult learners towards collaboration, connections, and common concerns within their community and beyond.

Creating Value from Meaning

Transformative learning focuses on the idea that adult learners can adjust their thinking based on new information and change the way adults see themselves and the world in which they live. Jack Mezirow, who developed the theory of transformative learning, believes that adults ought not apply their old understanding to new situations, instead they need to look at new perspectives to get a new understanding of things as they change. Mezirow theorized that when adult students have had teaching opportunities connected to their past experiences then critical reflection and review of these experiences could lead to a transformation of their understanding. Transformative learning is promoted when the very values and assumptions learned early in life are challenged by first identifying then through critical reflection upon exposure to different vantage points in instructional situations or other experiences which will impact on the transformation of beliefs and understanding of meanings. Through self-reflection and examination of the assumptions and

values upon which they have built their lives, a change of one's perspective can be achieved (Caffraella & Merriam, 1999) either by refining, transforming, or creating a new learning scheme. Bringing **personal experiences into the classroom** is an integral part of the adult teaching and learning process which allows the learner to engage both with the mind and emotions. It suggests that an adult learner's interpretation of the experience creates meaning, which leads to a change in the behavior, mindset, and beliefs. When transformational learning occurs, a learner may undergo a *paradigm shift* that directly impacts future experiences.

Ikeda's approach to learning echoes Mezirow's concept of finding meaning in education and expands it beyond the learner so that a value-creating education results in *finding meaning that enhances one's own existence and contributes to the well-being of others*. (Goulah, 2021a, Goulah, 2021b). His human education philosophy encourages the belief in everyone's unlimited potential and the possibility of our shared humanity by using education as the tool for mutual growth. Ikeda calls for "education that can develop the capacity to create value" and holds that dialogue is the catalyst through which we can fundamentally change a society that lacks compassion and transform its destiny (Ikeda, 2014, Goulah, 2012). *Value* in this sense does not refer to a monetary amount or a guiding principle that dictates behavior. Value creation in education, according to Ikeda, fosters people of character who continuously strive for the greatest good of peace, who are committed to protecting the sanctity of life, and who are capable of creating value in their lives. This notion of character development, or inner transformation is what Ikeda refers to as *the human revolution*.

Inukai and Okamura (2021) explain that human revolution is an inward change, from a lesser self who is focused on egos and roadblocks to a more open self who seeks ways to relieve pain and welcome happiness. It is a transformation of one's mindset as well as the recognition of one's potential. While Ikeda and others have applied this philosophy of human education in the teaching of the younger learners (K-12), what is missing is the infusion of this practice into adult education to create value and a deeper meaning for the adult learner. Creating value beyond the learner's purview translates into caring for others and working to have a just and inclusive society. This requires the learner to develop an awareness of the context when reflecting on learning content, and recognize the influencing roles that community, economy, race, gender, and politics play in transformative learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2011) as well as the perspective or learning lens through which this is being filtered.

In transformative learning, the learning cannot be separated from the context in which the learning is taking place, and integral parts of the learning are the physical and social experiences and situations learners find themselves, as well as the tools they use in that experience (Caffarella & Merriam, 1999). To take the learning experience further by interjecting Ikeda's idea of creating value reframes the experience and changes the adult learning teaching and process and outcome. By adults visualizing education not as a means to an end such as a degree or job promotion, but rather a continuous journey of growth as a human and global citizen, the value of the learning experience is emphasized. The key to this is to create curriculum from the viewpoint of the adult learner by asking "What is worth knowing, experiencing, doing, needing, becoming, overcoming, sharing and contributing?" (He et al., 2015; Schubert, 2009). It is not solely facts and skills adult learners want to know, it what is learned that constitutes the means to pursuing and expanding knowledge in the pursuit of what is worthwhile. This will create value and meaning for the adult learner in an effort to cultivate their character which enables them to live a more fulfilling life.

The actualization of positive possibilities – including those that may be far from apparent – is the essence of value creation (Odari, 2020).

Change from “Me” to “We”

Transformative learning in adult learners is impacted by the experiences, values, feelings, and frames of reference that make up their life. This milieu creates habits of mind and points of view from which the adult learner is influenced by assumptions, judgments, and attitudes (Mezirow, 1997). Adult learners can create a new point of view or change an existing one during this learning process. While it is important for adult learners to view learning as an autonomous activity with the objective of creating socially responsible thinkers, Ikeda has gone beyond this objective in his philosophy of human education. He strives for learners to become global citizens and bring people together to create dialogue to foster efforts to resolve social issues. His notion of *global citizenship* is viewed through the lens of humanism, and is framed by three fundamental elements: wisdom, courage, and compassion.

What defines global citizenship is the wisdom to perceive the interconnectedness of all life and living, the courage not to fear or deny differences, and mostly to respect people of other cultures and the compassion to extend empathy beyond the immediate surroundings (Guajardo and Reiser, 2016). Adult educators can assist in encouraging this transition to humanism by incorporating these elements into their instruction. Encouraging students with kindness to invite dialogue and exchange of opinions, anticipating the learning needs, and working together with students to explore new viewpoints will bring each adult learners' experiences into the global dialogue and pave the way for the interconnectedness of thoughts, ideas, and solutions to be borne and cultivated. It is in the interwoven fabric of human relationships where connections are made, dialogues can begin, and points of view can be changed to generate a positive impact on society. Engaging in dialogue, sharing values, and reaching across barriers to expand the circle of learning will foster a connectiveness and a collaborative effort towards resolving important issues and promote global citizenship (Goulah, 2021b, Ikeda, 2014).

Conclusion

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning has stood the test of time as a pillar in adult education and has a solid theoretical base for understanding and explaining the complexities of the adult learning process. However, this theory focuses on inner transformation that occurs as the learner absorbs and filters new information through current assumptions, perspectives, and schemes and allows the internal dialogue to determine the value and importance of said learning. Ikeda expands beyond the internal parameters in adult learning and encourages external dialogue to spotlight learning as a shared, ongoing journey, one which impacts not only the adult learner but society as well. Aligning the transformative learning theory of Mezirow with Ikeda's philosophical ideology of human education will allow for the facilitation of a deeper, more meaningful, value-created learning experience for adult learners. This alignment will need to be both self-directed by adult students as well as encouraged and supported in the classroom or other learning environment by educators. With the use of both internal and external dialogue to propel learning engagement and provide the roadmap to create new views and assumptions, this blended learning model will encourage a new mindset for adult learners as well as their teachers. This mindset promotes an open exchange of perspectives to address social, economic, and environmental issues plaguing our

planet, and it encourages *finding meaning to enhance one's own existence and contribute to the well-being of others*.

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