

Dimensions of Adult Learning

Each time I read the introductory chapters of a graduate student's thesis, I witness the struggle to review and define adult learning. And as I look at this nearly blank screen, thinking about the many perspectives on adult learning in the literature, I wonder whether there is anything I can contribute. It is my purpose in this chapter not so much to review the different ways in which adult learning is described, but rather to create the boundaries around transformative learning theory and to situate transformative learning theory within the more general literature on adult learning. When I teach courses and facilitate workshops on transformative learning, we inevitably come to a point in our discussions where everything seems transformative. Someone will say, "But if I learn a new computer skill, that frees me to do things in a new way and I feel transformed," or another person will say, "Learning to read is a skill, but it opens up the world," and almost always, people will begin to argue that children can engage in transformative learning. When a young person rebels against her parents' rules, is that not critical reflection? It takes us some time to work our way out of these dilemmas in our conversation. We deconstruct and then reconstruct the meaning of the theory. Perhaps what I can do in this chapter is to work through some of that process and at least clarify the perspective on transformative learning on which this book is based.

Essentially, I follow Mezirow's (2000, 2003a) definition of transformative learning as a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and thereby become more open, permeable, and better validated. However, I have been strongly influenced by the work of my colleagues who incorporate imagination, intuition, soul, and affect into their understanding of the process (Dirkx, 2001a). I no longer see transformative learning as an entirely cognitive, rational process (Cranton & Roy, 2003). This is the foundation from which I write in this book. Given that, let us return to situating transformative learning in the broader context of adult learning.

Adult Learning as a Distinctive Process

Adult learners are mature, socially responsible individuals who participate in sustained informal or formal activities that lead them to acquire new knowledge, skills, or values; elaborate on existing knowledge, skills, or values; revise their basic beliefs and assumptions; or change the way they see some aspect of themselves or the world around them. An adult learner might take classes to fulfill requirements in a Ph.D. program, participate in a training session required by her organization, learn how to ski, or join a bereavement group to understand her reactions to the death of her spouse. Learning in some form is an aspect of virtually every person's life.

Given the complexity of human differences, the diverse contexts within which people live and work, and the many types of things people learn, it seems fruitless to try to delineate general characteristics of adult learning. Yet we seem to want to be able to say that adult learning is different from children's learning, so for decades writers have tried to list those things that make adult learning distinctive. I review some of those characteristics here, though I also question how universal they are.

Adult learning is often described as *voluntary*. Individuals choose to become involved in either informal or formal learning activities

because they want to develop personally, or as a response to a professional or practical need. The loss of a job, a change in lifestyle, or a move to a different geographical location may prompt someone to want to learn. When we consider adult learning as voluntary, this leads to the assumption that people are highly motivated and interested in a content that is relevant to their needs, which may or may not be true. Many people feel obligated to attend workplace learning activities, and some may be required to engage in training or retraining. For those who participate in mandated programs, a skilled facilitator or a good course can pique interest, and conversely, even when people do choose to become involved in learning, their interest may flag for a variety of reasons.

Adult learning is usually described as *self-directed*. The concept of self-directed learning has permeated adult education theory and practice to such an extent that it is almost equated with adult education. Unfortunately, the definitions of self-directed learning are varied and confusing. It was Knowles (1975, 1980) who started this when he suggested that all adults have a preference for being self-directed. The word “preference” was overlooked, and educators assumed learners were self-directed. Knowles saw self-directed learning as a process by which people made the instructional design decisions—identifying their needs, setting their own goals, choosing how to learn, gathering materials, finding resources, and judging their progress. Knowles felt that this was a distinguishing characteristic of adult learning. It was by no means intended to be an independent or isolating way of learning; however, in some of its applications it became so. Over the years, self-direction came to mean a characteristic of a person (similar to autonomy), a method of teaching, a developmental goal, and several other variations on these themes. In 1991, Candy sorted out the literature up to that point and developed a helpful framework. The four facets of self-direction he described were learner control (people making decisions about their learning within a formal context), autonomy (a personal characteristic), self-management (planning one’s educational

experiences), and autodidaxy (engaging in informal, independent learning projects).

Many writers propose that adult learning should be practical or *experiential* in nature, an idea that began with Dewey (1938) and has stayed with us over the decades. It is based on the assumption that adults have immediate problems to solve and that they wish to apply their learning directly to their workplace or to their personal lives. Most surveys of why adults participate in educational programs reveal this as a theme (Livneh & Livneh, 1999), practitioners make every effort to include real-life applications in their programs, and acting on learning (or sometimes “transfer of learning,” meaning application in the world outside of the classroom) is often described as the goal of education. Mezirow (2003b) suggests that transformation has not taken place until an individual has acted on the learning. However, as I propose in Chapter Five, people may vary on the extent to which they value practical learning and experiential activities.

Through the influence of humanism, we tend to see adult education as *collaborative* and participatory. Sitting in a circle, working in groups, and interacting with others are hallmarks of adult education practice. Educators describe themselves as facilitators rather than teachers, and they seek to establish a co-learner role with their students. They consider a comfortable and safe atmosphere, both physical and psychological, to be important. Recent explorations of critical theory and postmodernism in adult education have called some of these assumptions into question. Brookfield (2001), for example, uses Foucault’s understanding of power to point out how many of our traditional collaborative approaches, such as sitting in a circle, lead people to feel vulnerable and exposed, and other techniques, such as keeping a personal journal, actually allow the educator to engage in surveillance or “get into the head” of the participant.

Knowles (1980), whose work still forms the foundation of much of what we do in adult education today, emphasized the rich *experiences and resources* adults bring to the learning setting. If we dis-

agree with all of the other characteristics that distinguish andragogy (defined by Knowles as the art and science of helping adults learn) from pedagogy, we cannot deny that adults have more experience to bring than do children. From a constructivist point of view, learners share their experiences and resources with each other to create new knowledge. This tenet fits well with the other defining qualities of adult learning—the learning is practical and relevant, people collaborate to construct learning, it is voluntary, and to some extent at least, it must be self-directed. We can question, of course, whether sharing experiences is important to all individuals and whether all types of learning are enhanced by this process.

Self-concept is frequently mentioned in relation to adult learning. A low self-concept is seen as inhibiting learning, and increased self-concept is described as a goal of adult learning. This is certainly also related to the prevailing notion that the climate of adult classes should be comfortable, safe, and relaxing. Along the same lines, there is the worry that going “back to school,” especially engaging in formal educational activities, is *anxiety-provoking* for adults. This follows from the assumption that school was a negative, teacher-directed experience for many, and a return to this atmosphere brings back the fears of earlier years. Another line of reasoning here is that many adults have been away from learning experiences for a number of years and have rusty reading, writing, and time management skills, which lead them to feel anxious about their ability to succeed. In the last decade or two, as people make more and more shifts in their careers and retraining and professional development become more common, this characteristic may be less defining of adult learning than it was in previous times.

Discussions of adult learning almost always include mention of *learning styles*. Those who specialize in childhood education also are concerned with learning style, so this characteristic does not necessarily differentiate adult from childhood learning. Cognitive style refers to how people acquire, process, store, and use information, and there are a number of different approaches to defining cognitive style

(Cranton, 2000b). Learning style consists of a preference for a certain condition or way of learning and is generally considered to be value-neutral (MacKeracher, 2004); that is, one style is not better than another. Kolb's (1984) delineation of convergers, assimilators, divergers, and accommodators remains popular today. More recently, we have been influenced by Gardner's (Gardner, Kornhaber, & Wake, 1996) idea of multiple intelligences (musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and natural) and Goleman's (1998) notion of emotional intelligence. The latter has to do with a person's ability to manage emotions, recognize emotions in others, and establish good relationships with others. Some associate learning preferences to gender. For example, MacKeracher (2004), among others, suggests that women prefer relational learning and men autonomous learning. This can also be seen as stereotyping and marginalizing women (English, 2004).

Transformative Learning in Context

If I have succeeded in describing some of the features of adult learning as they have been presented in the literature over the last two or three decades, and I am not sure I have, how does transformative learning fit within this context? I now go back over the characteristics with an eye specifically turned to transformative learning.

There seems to be no doubt that transformative learning is voluntary. People may not always deliberately set out to critically question their beliefs and values; many times transformative learning is prompted by an outside event and that event may be unexpected, hurtful, or devastating. Even so, people have the choice of being critically self-reflective or not. In a classroom or other learning environment where the educator has fostering transformative learning as a goal, participants still voluntarily engage in the process. If someone were to mandate transformation or try to force people into the

process, I think we step outside of the definition of transformative learning and into something like brainwashing or indoctrination.

Is transformative learning self-directed? I see the two concepts as interwoven. If we agree that transformative learning is voluntary, as I have just proposed, then a certain amount of self-direction is required for an individual to take the steps of moving into a critical questioning of beliefs, assumptions, and perspectives. People who are completely oppressed may not have the ability to move into this process for all sorts of personal and social reasons. (This is one of the criticisms of Mezirow's work by those who advocate transformative learning as social change.) Mezirow (2000) says that those who are hungry and living in poverty or other extreme social conditions are not likely to participate in transformative learning. Merriam (2004) goes so far as to propose that people need a certain level of cognitive development, and hence a certain level of education. Although these statements are certainly questionable, especially when we are open to processes other than critical self-reflection as central to transformation, it still seems to be the case that transformative learning leads to increased self-direction, so in a way the two go hand in hand. Both are developmental processes.

If being practical or experiential is a defining characteristic of adult learning in terms of adults having immediate problems they wish to solve (and I am not sure this is always the case—people come to learning for a variety of reasons), transformative learning does not necessarily meet this prerequisite. True, it is often provoked by an experience, and Kolb (1984) among others sees reflection on experience as a necessary part of learning, but the process itself may be driven by critical *self*-reflection, exploration, and intuition with no further reference to the world outside of the self. This may be especially true for more introverted people (see Chapter Five) and in those times when transformation involves unconscious images and soul work (Dirkx, 2000). Discourse with others may play a vital role, and at times, transformative learning may look like problem

solving, but I do not see it necessarily as being a practical process. If we follow Mezirow's thinking, the outcome should be action, but the learning process need not be experiential.

That adult learning in general is seen as participatory and collaborative applies to some extent to transformative learning, depending on how one views the theory. Belenky and Stanton (2000), for example, emphasize conflicts being resolved through dialogue, conversation, storytelling, and perspective sharing. Mezirow (2000) sees discourse with others as playing an important role in transformative learning. The sharing of experiences and values within a comfortable group atmosphere can obviously act as a stimulant for critical questioning. However, transformation can also occur without collaboration, so I do not think we can describe collaboration as being a defining characteristic of transformative learning.

Transformative learning has to do with making meaning out of experiences and questioning assumptions based on prior experience. Our habitual expectations—what we expect to happen based on what has happened in the past—are the product of experiences, and it is those expectations that are called into question during the transformative learning process. If adult learning is distinguished from childhood learning by the experiences people bring to it, then so can transformative learning be explained as a prerogative of adults. Mezirow (2000) draws on King and Kitchener (1994) and others to argue that it is only in adulthood that people develop the reflective judgment necessary to assess their own reasoning about their habitual expectations.

Self-concept is as relevant to transformative learning as it is to adult learning in general. By definition, transformative learning leads to a changed self-perception. When people revise their habits of mind, they are reinterpreting their sense of self in relation to the world. I think of the college trades instructors with whom I work every summer in the Maritimes of Canada. They have returned to school after years and sometimes decades of experience in their trade, and they are in the process of becoming teachers of

their trade. Their self-concept in relation to their ability to succeed in university courses may be shaky, but they have chosen to teach, and this is something they must do. At the same time, they are confident and sure of their skills as electricians, carpenters, and automotive mechanics. How they see themselves and how they come to see themselves over the course of this transition is often transformative. Their self-concept is central to the process they undergo.

Although it is not often mentioned in the transformative learning literature, I see learning style as an important consideration in understanding how people experience transformation. I have long advocated for an expansion of the description of transformative learning that is open to this (Cranton, 1994; 2000a). I explore this more fully in Chapter Five.

Perspectives on Adult Learning

There are many patterns or systems of understanding adult learning. Merriam and Brockett (1997) present a philosophical classification system that includes liberalism, progressivism, behaviorism, humanism, and radicalism. The oldest philosophy in Western society is liberal education where the goal is to produce “intelligent, informed, cultured, and moral citizenry” (p. 33). In the mid-nineteenth century, progressivism emerged in response to industrialization. In this philosophy, more emphasis is placed on knowledge derived from science and rationality, and experience is seen as a source of learning. The behaviorists of the 1950s saw learning as a change in behavior that occurs as people respond to stimuli from the environment and are rewarded or punished. Knowledge is seen to be external to the self. Humanist philosophies came forward in reaction to behaviorism, although the roots of this way of thinking are much older. The humanists of the 1960s viewed learning as personal development through interpersonal relationships which, in turn, contributes to the common good of humanity. The radical or

critical philosophical framework of education came to the fore in the late 1960s and early 1970s through the work of Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich. The goal is social change through challenges to the current capitalist and democratic systems. Feminist theory has also contributed to the thinking of radical educators.

It may be helpful to think of there being at least two dimensions underlying the different perspectives on adult learning. One is the individual-to-social continuum. Some theorists and some practitioners prefer to focus on the individual's learning process, while others are more interested in social change and advocating for reform. Humanists tend to be interested in individual development and critical theorists in social reform. Transformative learning can be viewed from either perspective (Brookfield, 2000), and, indeed, this is a debate in the literature. Perhaps it need not be an either-or issue, but simply a preference as to where educators wish to spend their time and energy. Both individual and social perspectives are important, and obviously both exist, one within the other. We become individuals in a society.

The second dimension has to do with kinds of knowledge—the interests that drive the learning process and the type of knowledge that results from the learning. This is not a continuum, but rather a set of interrelated understandings of the world and ourselves within that world (in that sense, the individual-social continuum exists within kinds of knowledge). It is helpful, in locating transformative learning within the larger arena of adult learning theory, to see how it is connected to the different kinds of knowledge with which educators work. Does a trades instructor have the potential to foster transformative learning? A literacy educator? A teacher of nursing? There are many ways of classifying knowledge, as anyone who has ventured into philosophy can attest. Here, I use Habermas's (1971) work, and I choose this foundation as it is one Mezirow (1991) drew upon when he introduced transformative learning theory to the adult education literature.

Technical Knowledge

Technical knowledge is that which allows us to manipulate and control the environment, predict observable physical and social events, and take appropriate actions. Empirical or natural scientific methodologies produce technically useful knowledge, the knowledge necessary for industry and production in modern society. In this paradigm, knowledge is established by reference to external reality, using the senses. There is an objective world made up of observable phenomena. The laws governing physical and social systems can be identified through science, and these systems are seen to operate independently of human perceptions. Habermas criticizes instrumental rationality when it becomes such a pervasive ideology that we either believe all knowledge is instrumental or try to fit all knowledge into that category. In the Age of Enlightenment, the application of reason was seen as the way to solve the world's problems. As a result, empirical scientific methods were viewed as superior to subjective, qualitative, or spiritual ways of knowing. Only recently has modernism (the reign of logic) been criticized in the social sciences and education as not allowing a deeper, more open understanding of human interactions.

Mezirow (1991) refers to the acquisition of technical knowledge as instrumental learning. Much of adult education practice has instrumental learning as a goal. Workplace programs often consist of training and retraining programs that focus on instrumental learning. Trades and technology programs contain both theoretical and practical, hands-on learning in concrete areas such as marine or automobile mechanics, silviculture, dental hygiene, and electronic communications. A good proportion of professional development for health professionals emphasizes new scientific information and techniques. However, problems arise when areas such as interpersonal relations and communications are treated as instrumental learning and forced into the training model.

Practical Knowledge

The second kind of knowledge is based on our need to understand each other through language. Habermas (1971) calls this practical or communicative knowledge. Human beings have always been social creatures, instinctively forming groups, tribes, communities, cultures, and nations in order to satisfy their mutual needs. In order for people to survive together in groups and societies, they must communicate with and understand each other. There are no scientific laws governing these communications—when we communicate with others, we interpret what they say in our own way. This does not mean that communicative knowledge is entirely individual. All societies share and transmit social knowledge, that is, a code of commonly accepted beliefs and behavior. As a society we come to agree on how things should be and are in reference to standards and values, moral and political issues, educational and social systems, and government actions. Communicative knowledge is derived from shared interpretation and consensus and then often becomes reified. Habermas criticizes communicative knowledge as being too dependent on subjective understanding. He argues that people may misinterpret the world around them based on distorted assumptions about themselves or society. We want social knowledge to be objective and concrete and therefore stop questioning the systems around us, unaware of the distortions that may exist in our assumptions.

It is fairly obvious that the acquisition of practical or communicative knowledge comprises a good deal of what people do in adult education. Studies in psychology, sociology, politics, education, language, literature, fine arts, and history focus on communicative learning. Leadership training, interpersonal skills, teamwork, conflict resolution, communication skills, and the new emphasis on emotional intelligence illustrate the importance of communicative learning in workplace settings. Almost wherever you see people working collaboratively in groups to share and interpret their experiences and construct new understandings, you have communicative learning taking place.

Emancipatory Knowledge

The third kind of knowledge, which derives from a questioning of instrumental and communicative knowledge, Habermas calls emancipatory. By nature, people are interested in self-knowledge, growth, development, and freedom. Gaining emancipatory knowledge is dependent on our abilities to be self-determining and self-reflective. Self-determination can be described as the capacity to both be aware and critical of ourselves and of our social and cultural context. Self-reflection involves being aware and critical of our subjective perceptions of knowledge and of the constraints of social knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge is gained through a process of critically questioning ourselves and the social systems within which we live. The philosophical foundation of emancipatory knowledge lies in critical theory. In this paradigm, instrumental and communicative knowledge are not rejected but are seen as limiting. If we do not question current scientific and social theories and accepted truths, we may never realize how we are constrained by their inevitable distortions and errors. Without the possibility of critical questioning of ourselves and our beliefs, such constraining knowledge can be accepted by entire cultures.

Emancipatory learning has been a goal of adult education through time and, to some extent, across cultures. In a history of adult education in Britain, Harrison (1961) states that “it has been in the main regarded as a movement for freedom and liberation, both personal . . . and social” (p. xii). In North America, Lindeman (1926) describes ideal adult education as cooperative, nonauthoritarian, informal, and as a quest for the roots of our preconceptions. Freire (1970) saw his work in literacy education in South America as a “deepening awareness of both the sociocultural reality which shapes [learners’] lives and . . . their capacity to transform that reality through action upon it” (p. 27).

A careful reading of Mezirow’s (1991) expression of the goal of adult education as transformative learning reveals how it is drawn

from Habermas's idea of emancipatory knowledge and also reflects the thinking of earlier theorists: "The goal of adult education is to help adult learners become more critically reflective, participate more fully and freely in rational discourse and action, and advance developmentally by moving toward meaning perspectives that are more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative of experience" (pp. 224–225). There have been variations in wording and debates about the role of critical reflection and discourse in the process, but the essence of this statement has remained at the core of transformative learning theory.

Emancipatory learning occurs in informal and formal educational settings, including community development groups, self-help groups, professional development programs, literacy education, union education, and political and environmental movements, to name just a few. Perhaps more important, emancipatory learning can occur in any setting where learning occurs. A person acquiring a technical skill can gain new self-confidence and begin to see his or her place in the world in a new light. When I first learned Blackboard and WebCT (software programs for online teaching), I acquired instrumental knowledge, but I revised my perspective on what good education is as a result. In some of the great social change movements in adult education, such as the Antigonish movement in Canada (for example, see Gillen, 1998), people obtained basic economic, literacy, and social skills, which provided them with the foundation for emancipatory learning.

Perspectives on Adult Learning: Integration

Now that I have taken apart the different kinds of learning in order to see what place transformative learning has, I would like to put them back together again before we proceed to the next chapters. I find it useful to categorize things in order to understand them, but I also find it limiting and fragmenting to leave these things in their categories.

Let us think about Steve's learning. I worked with Steve in a recent summer school program, and although I have changed information that might identify him, the story follows his journey. Steve is a marine mechanic in his late forties. Steve has come to the university to work on a Certificate in Adult Education in hopes of finding a position teaching his trade. Steve's hands bear the marks of his years in his trade—they look swollen and stiff, and the black of engine grease seems worn into his skin. He dresses in jeans and a T-shirt, even though most of the other men in the group wear shorts during the hot summer days (our classroom has no air conditioning). Steve is friendly, he smiles often, and he is quiet in class.

Steve is nervous about a good many things, as can be imagined. For our purposes here, I am going to concentrate on just one of those things—his need to acquire a variety of technical computer skills. Steve had struggled through one online course, impeded by his poor keyboarding and his lack of familiarity with computers, and he had been learning to use e-mail and e-mail attachments. In our course, he decided to participate in a blog (Web-based dialogue) learning activity with a classmate. When a few others in the group offered to teach PowerPoint to those who were interested, Steve was enthusiastic about this opportunity as well. He was not sure as to how these skills would be useful in his future teaching career, but he felt they were things he should know.

Steve's acquisition of the technical skills required to participate in the blog and to create a PowerPoint presentation occurs with a mixture of joy, anxiety, and, I sense, a feeling of being an imposter. What is he doing here? How do all of these things fit together? Should he be in a university course? How can he contribute to others' learning in the way his classmates are contributing to his? It would be impossible, I think, to separate Steve's instrumental learning from his communicative learning. As he participates in the blog activity, the technique skills he learns are simultaneously applied to dialogue with his peer and me. It is not that he learns something and then uses it later in a different way—the two occur together.

To learn PowerPoint, we are all together in a computer lab and three of the course members lead the learning. I am participating as a learner, but I notice how it is going with Steve and other newcomers to this technology. Again, the technical skill is learned and simultaneously used to create something that communicates with others. Steve is excited; he shares his work with those near him, and he looks around, laughing.

I can see the two strands—instrumental and communicative learning—but I cannot see how they could be separated. And what of the emancipatory learning? Steve questioned his assumptions about who he was and what he was capable of doing and revised his self-perception in such a way that it was more open and better justified (I also had the opportunity to read his autobiography and his reflections on the course, which supported my observations of his learning). He became free of some fairly overwhelming constraints stemming from his past habits of mind. Of course, I cannot attribute all of this to his participating in a blog or learning PowerPoint, but neither can I separate it from that learning. In his final reflection and self-evaluation, Steve said that “everything came together,” and he saw how he “could be a teacher.” Things were no longer “little pieces,” “the whole made sense.” In this way, meaningful learning integrates instrumental and communicative knowledge, and emancipatory learning occurs when that knowledge changes a person’s perspective on himself and the world.

Steve’s story is not representative, of course, of all learning experiences, though I see it often enough to be sure that it is not unique either. Still, there are times when people go along acquiring large amounts of instrumental or communicative knowledge before the pieces come together, and there are many occasions when emancipatory learning does not occur. As Mezirow (2000) says, learning can also be the acquisition of new knowledge or elaboration on existing knowledge without calling into question any previously held assumptions or beliefs. However, as educators I think we should always be conscious of the potential of those moments

when the acquisition of new knowledge can move into the realm of emancipation. In order to do this, we need to be aware of the wholeness of learning. As useful as it would appear to be on the surface to be able to say “this is going to be transformative learning” and “this cannot be transformative,” I think we would do ourselves a disservice to try to define this out of context. We know that transformative learning involves a deep shift in perspective and that it leads to a way of seeing the world that is more open. But we cannot say what kind of a learning experience will promote this shift in perspective in any person or any context.

Summary

In the last ten or fifteen years, transformative learning theory has taken a central place in the adult education literature. There are conferences and a journal dedicated solely to transformative learning. In this chapter, I situate transformative learning within the broader field. I do this in two ways. First, I review some of the key features that are used to characterize adult learning—the voluntary nature of adult learning, adults’ preference for self-direction, the importance of adult learning meeting practical needs, its collaborative nature, the role of adults’ experiences in their learning, the relevance of self-concept, and the emphasis on learning styles. Although not all of these characteristics are unique to the learning of adults, together they provide an overall description of how we think of adult learning. I explore how each of these qualities is an attribute of transformative learning.

Second, I look at different perspectives on adult learning, starting with a brief overview of philosophies of adult learning. I think there are at least two dimensions underlying the way we see adult learning—the individual-social continuum and the kinds of knowledge we are interested in. I discuss this latter dimension in more depth using Habermas’s three types of knowledge (from which Mezirow found a basis for transformative learning theory). *Technical*

knowledge is the cause-and-effect, objective, scientific knowledge that allows us to control and manipulate our environment. *Practical* or *communicative knowledge* is the knowledge of ourselves, others, and our social world. *Emancipatory knowledge* is that which frees us from personal and social constraints and leads to awareness and development. It is emancipatory learning, which is based on the critical examination of instrumental and communicative knowledge, that is transformative.

Finally, I argue that any classification system is limiting, and propose that we often cannot separate kinds of learning. I illustrate this with the story of Steve, whose acquisition of instrumental and communicative knowledge occurs simultaneously with his emancipatory learning. Transformative learning is a subset of adult learning—not all adult learning is transformative—but it does not occur separately from other kinds of learning. It is when instrumental and communicative learning leads us to question our previously held views about ourselves and the world around us that the potential for transformative learning exists.