Proceedings of the 9th Transformative Learning Conference
Athens, Greece, 28-29 May 2011

Michel Alhadeff-Jones & Alexis Kokkos (eds)
"Transformative Learning in Time of Crisis: Individual and Collective Challenges"

"Training the trainers at the University in time of crisis: implications of Transformative Learning for adult learning, educational programs and curriculum".

Jerome Eneau (PhD), Eric Bertrand (PhD) and Genevieve Lameul (PhD)
University of Rennes, France.

Abstract:

This contribution presents a Masters program preparing for careers in adult education, especially vocational and professional training, in Rennes (Brittany - France). While the economic crisis has accentuated the injunction to answer to work difficulties with instrumental responses, the main pedagogical challenge rests on the answer that can offer this program, targeting skills that are not only based on instrumental knowledge but also on reflexive and transformative abilities. The example of two course units, offered during a same semester, illustrates how learners are led to examine, through their experience, their own meaning schemes to change their perspectives. For this, we focus on both self-directed learning and co-constructed learning, in a "dialogic perspective".

The Proceedings of the International Transformative Learning Conference in Europe
9th International Conference on Transformative Learning

1

Introduction

This contribution will illustrate what transformative learning can bring to a Masters program preparing students for careers in adult education (HRD, training manager, consultant, etc.) at the University of Rennes (Brittany, France). More specifically, we will be discussing the results of an action research, using both self-directed learning and reciprocal cooperative learning for a global aim of learners transformation.

The general context surrounding this action research is a work crisis, in France. With the recent laws (2004 and 2009), and even more so with the economic crisis of 2008-2009, the technical aim has been further reinforced. Training is more than ever seen as a way to prevent and even fix the effects of structural and cyclical unemployment. The focus is no longer on personal development or reflecting on the place and role of human resources, but rather on the effectiveness and efficiency of the training, concerns that are now omnipresent at work.

In this context, those who work in training or HRD seem caught in paradoxical logic, and they are faced with a major risk, that of developing and instituting practices that stem from instrumentalized action based on excessive information to the detriment of communicative action based on reflection and critical distance. Teaching practices at the University are not immune to these two complementary yet competing forms of reasoning. The stance universities take on preparing students to provide training to others is increasingly called into question in France (De Lescure & Frétigné, 2010). At our university and more specifically within our Masters, where we are responsible for the pedagogy of the program, the issue for us was to imagine a teaching model that could reconcile the conflicting points of view.

For this article, we would first like to discuss the advantages of such a project and also the issues at stake in choosing to use a training and pedagogical mentoring model based on the theory of transformative learning.

1. Work Crisis: transformative learning to "make it through"

1.1. The crisis: but a crisis where exactly?

The recent financial and economic crisis has revealed what certain French politicians have called a "moral crisis" when talking about the work crisis. We should say rather a crisis at work <u>and</u> a work crisis because, while massive unemployment is one of the major consequences of the economic crisis, there is also (and perhaps more importantly) a crisis <u>at</u> work in the conditions under which it is carried out (Dejours, 2010).

What do we mean exactly when we say a crisis? For our purposes here we consider it an ontological, critical process which, from a psycho-sociological point of view, simultaneously affects institutions, organizations, groups and individuals, although it affects them differently (Barus-Michel, Enriquez & Levy, 2006). Between deregulation and weakened social and psychological ties the crisis affects our systems of symbolism, values, and the creation of representations of the world. While the moment of change is key, it also impacts our "individual and collective experience", made up of schemas of meaning, values, knowledge, representations and beliefs (Bertrand, 2007). How, then, can we elucidate and make sense out

of the tensions between oneself, others and the environment? How can we support individuals as they incorporate the challenges to their relationship to themselves, to others and the world, in contexts of such tension? And which types of perspectives on meaning should be encouraged, for individuals, groups, organizations and more generally in the institutions of teaching, adult education, professional training and the work world?

That is the central issue in this action-research training that we are currently conducting with current or future training professionals, who are directly concerned with the matter. Our Masters program at the University of Rennes accepts 20 to 25 learners every year; a majority of them work already as training professionals and are returning to university to earn a degree that takes into account and recognizes their experience. Our program has both instrumental aims, accessing or maintaining employment through the acquisition of approved skills in the form of a diploma, and then the aim of working with the individuals towards their personal fulfillment and their social and existential development. In today's context, the program must also work with these learners to help them act and react in the face of an ever more destabilizing context. Yet we, as the trainers responsible for the pedagogical aspect of this program, we are aware that if in action and learning what is principally valued is the objective, instrumental world, there is a risk that a training program develop into a social world taken over, colonized by outside plans, prohibiting any communicative acts and any truly critical thinking. How can we reconcile these contradictory currents of thought?

1.2 In response to the crisis: "colonization" by the objective world?

Today in France, adult professional education is clearly oriented towards the socio-technical aims of adapting the subject to changes in the work world. This has not always been the case, and for many years its humanist aims were capital. However, since its institutionalization in the 1970s (Tremblay & Eneau, 2006), this new orientation became increasingly important throughout the 1980s and 90s and today is seen as even more "legitimate" because of the economic crisis. Training is now more than ever considered as a possible solution to remedy and prevent structural unemployment. The current focus is no longer on personal development, the construction of individuals' humanity or the development of a critical conscience. The spirit of the times is intent on effective training, a return on investment, security in a career path or even "flexicurity".

In this context dominated by a logic of reification (Honneth, 2007), with permanent injunctions of autonomization and responsibilisation (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999), the players in the field of training seem to be caught in between contradictory lines of reasoning: adapt, manage and develop, but with a serious risk, that of instituting practices imbued with mainly instrumental action (Habermas, 1976), at the expense of reflective, communicational, critical action, both in training and in the world of work. However, following the tradition of the School of Frankfurt, we know that when the objective world with its instrumental logic is the sole driving force behind action and learning, there is a risk that training and training systems develop in a social world taken over by an essentially "financial" educational logic (Freire, 2006)… and as goes education and training, so goes the world.

Yet our experience in training shows us that actually, the subjects and the worlds they move in seek to join rather than separate the exclusive reasoning systems of mastery, mutual understanding and emancipation. It shows us that the organizational systems put in place by the training professionals we work with come up against the complexity of a system that must simultaneously be working towards "producing" skills and adaptable, adapted subjects – those are often the requirements that professionals must meet – as well as working at all costs with the desire of the subjects, who themselves aim at self-production or auto-realization.

2. Transformative learning as an opportunity for dialogism

One question, clearly related to the paradigm of complexity (Morin, 1999) that is of concern to training designers is their ability to analyze complex psychosocial situations in the workplace, to analyze their own actions in order to better understand themselves and others and to resist some types of domination. The next question is what ethical position do they take in constructing their professional identity. And the last question that needs to be answered concerns their training and the strengthening of that capacity for (self) transformation.

2.1 Action-research training: from aims to methods of action

These are the primary focuses that are explored in our program that supports the construction of the students' professional identity by offering them a place for personal, social and institutional transformation. While university teaching practices, both in the adult education department and elsewhere, are not immune to the complementary but also competing lines of thought described above, because they are long-term programs (at least in Masters programs), they do allow a place for a social pedagogy built on thoughtful consideration of experiences, training for the individual conducted by the individual and by others (Eneau, 2008).

Certainly, the instrumental aims of accessing or maintaining employment through skills acquisition and access to a degree are important, particularly in Masters programs with professional aims (and our Master degree is a so called "Professional Master"). However the program also provides, and this is perhaps most important, a space set aside especially to work with the individuals towards their personal and intellectual realization, with the aim of promoting conscientious, critical development (Mezirow, 2000; Brookfield, 2005; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009).

In the best possible scenario, this happens in an approach of dialogism (Jacques, 2004) through real discussions (time to meet and discuss for pedagogical aims, training, reflective work, etc.) with the aim of communication and according to a certain ethic of social and educational communication. But behind the principles and the aims that are the basis of our pedagogical team's goals for the Masters program lie the following questions: does developing critical thought as a form of transformative education at the university then allow individuals to impact and socially transform reality? What influence do these pedagogical choices have on transforming the crisis situations of a personal, professional or organizational nature experienced by the students and those they work with?

2.2   The field of research: two transformative learning course units

The aim of the Masters program being discussed here is both to promote research in the field of adult training and to allow the students access to professional qualifications on three levels, political, functional and operational (or pedagogical), that we call *macro*, *meso* and *micro* levels. The training system is clearly motivated by the idea of training "by" and "for" both research and action. The work/study component (*alternance* in French) of the program is key.

Within this talk, it is not feasible for us to go into all the details of the action-research program in its entirety. We will sum it up briefly by saying that it is research being done with a training program, based on reflective analysis of work and learning. We are looking at the experiences of students in order to examine the rational dialogue that is held at the university, in the workplace or work placement sites where training takes place. We focus specifically on how this process works to support transformations in the learners' perspective on meaning and those perspectives within groups of professionals and in organizations. We examine how what we call "experiential dialogism" (Bertrand, 2007) is created, meaning the combining of different reasoning systems that are often seen as contradictory – technical mastery, intellectual development and mutual understanding.

In this research, we are in the position of participating observers while learners are both the subject and the object of the research. Students' individual work (a project that allows them to validate their credits in the "Analysis of practices" course unit or a paper concerning the tools they used in their work experience) and group work (a project that allows them to validate their credits in the "Designing systems to manage a professional career path") are the main sources from which we draw our information.

Observation of situations during workshops during the one week out of the month that the students come together is another regular source of information about the changes in students' ability to reflect, about the alterations in the meaning that students experience (Mezirow, 1991) or the subject selected for reflective work (processes, content, or initial experiences); the situations that students describe let us experience the complex world of work that they are newly involved in at their year-long placements
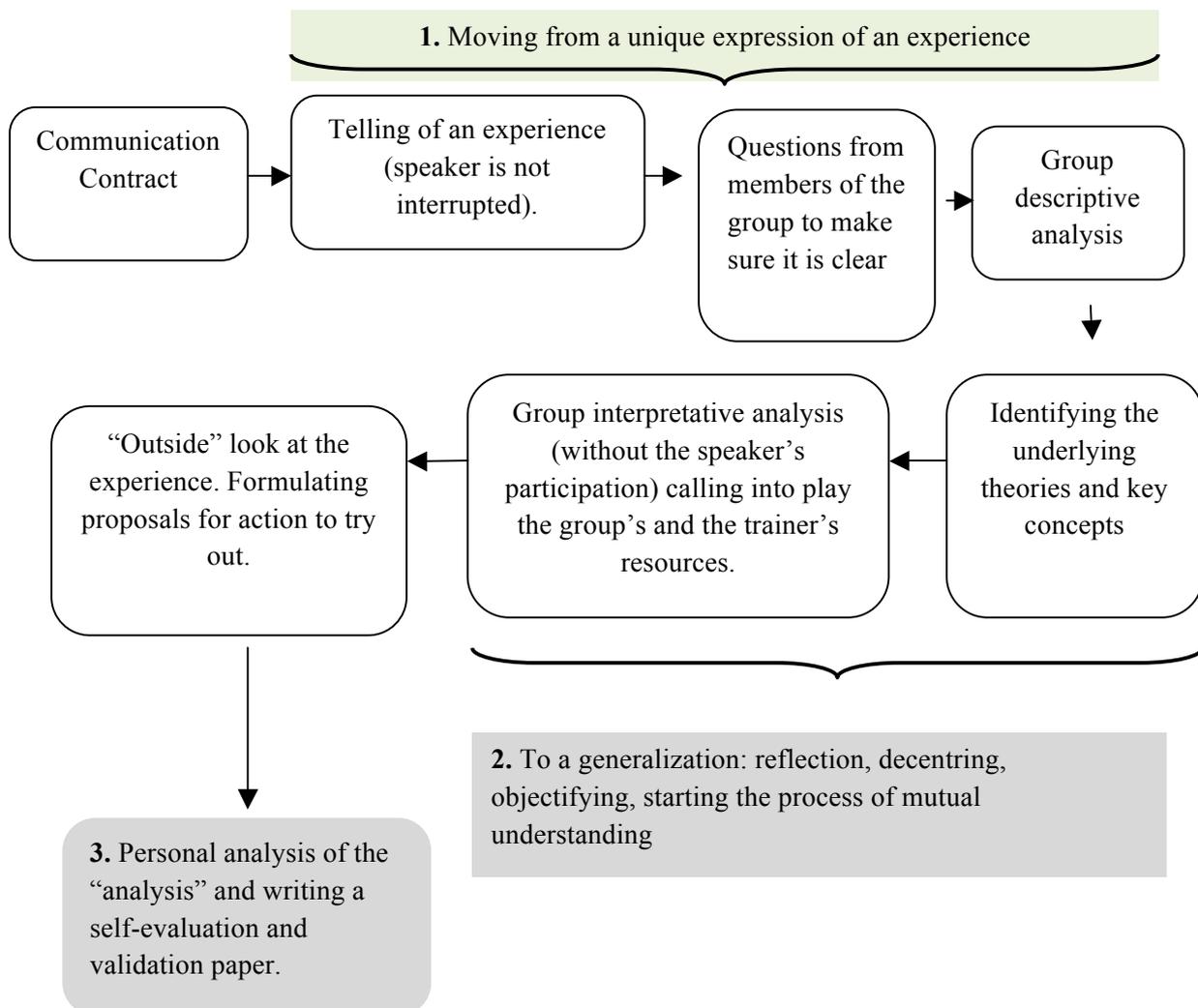
2.3 Presentation of two of the course units and learning models

The aim of the semester-long "Analysis of Practices" course unit (21 hours) is to teach a dual reflection, both individual auto-reflection and shared group reflection, on work itself, especially the issues of ethics and learners' professional positioning. The analysis of practices is a "moment" in which all the conditions for rational and reflective dialogue are met, during 5 monthly, half-day sessions.

It is a time set aside and a space that encourages the mutual understanding that comes from the process of decentring (distinguishing three separate spaces: oneself, others and the environment) and reflective thinking for a questioning of expectations to be supported by language acts, both those experienced in the work situation and in training.

This process can be illustrated as follows:

Model of the transformative learning process in practice analysis groups

1. Moving from a unique expression of an experience

| Communication Contract | → | Telling of an experience (speaker is not interrupted). | → | Questions from members of the group to make sure it is clear | → | Group descriptive analysis |

"Outside" look at the experience. Formulating proposals for action to try out. ← Group interpretative analysis (without the speaker's participation) calling into play the group's and the trainer's resources. ← Identifying the underlying theories and key concepts

2. To a generalization: reflection, decentring, objectifying, starting the process of mutual understanding

3. Personal analysis of the "analysis" and writing a self-evaluation and validation paper.

In the course unit entitled "Designing systems to manage a professional career path" (56 hours), transformative learning is explored as an analysis model that will serve students in negotiating and constructing a research or study goal. They will also use it in observing and understanding the adult learning strategies used in individualizing systems (accreditation of prior experience, skills assessment, continuing education sabbatical, etc.) within the framework of specific continuing education policies, systems and programs. This course unit is also one where the students "observe themselves learning". The aims of transformative education are emancipatory as well as instrumental and regulated by the form of the communicative action: the students must understand each other in order to carry out a group study. In these two course units, the reflective work that is undertaken leads the learners to question the content and the process as well as the basis of their past and current experiences and their own "obstacles to thinking". The aim of these course units is to help create, in the long term, a reflective practitioner.

3. Towards an ethic of dialog in a time of crisis

3.1   Experience as a co-constructor of meaning

To the question posed above about working towards transformative learning in the midst of a crisis that particularly affects work, Mendel (1992) provides one answer from which this Masters program draws inspiration for its pedagogical strategy. In Mendel's research, different dimensions play simultaneously: institutional dimensions ("institutionalizing" transformations), organizational dimensions (ecological, economic, material transformations), social dimensions (professional identity, codes, values) and lastly intellectual and spiritual dimensions (critical, emanicapatory self-reflection on the bases of the experience).

Any crisis then requires that the ties between psychological foundations and social foundations be changed and reinvented. Put another way, the crises that individuals experience (be they imposed or chosen, in the case of a professional reorientation for example) and those that result from a more general context (difficult economic times, a period of high unemployment, work that consists of "managing the crisis" etc.) both require a comparison of experiences and environments (objective, social and subjective). More generally, this proposal has some relation to the very definition that Wulf (1999) gives for education and brings to mind the "authorality" (*autoralité*, in French, i.e. being the author of one's own self, of one's training, of one's identity).

Transformative learning works with meaning as a way to understand experiences, yet what happens in a crisis of meaning is that with language, this ability to "create meaning" can be lost at some point in the training. This becomes a deeply destabilizing moment where deconstruction can become random, difficult and risky. Afterwards, reconstruction is that much more difficult. This crisis can become a disconnect that inhibits the ability to think (distortion of meaning) and that then requires transformative mentoring, a new experience co-constructing the meaning that has been lost, particularly when the crisis is also a crisis of "developing consciousness" (Barus-Michel, Enriquez & Levy, 2002).

3.2 Supporting existential and professional transformations

To review and work through a personal and professional experience, Kaës (1979) proposes the idea of transitionality "as the structure for an experience of a break in continuity" and transitional analysis as a condition to reconstruct the self and rebuild confidence in one's own continuity. As the trainers responsible for the pedagogical program, we clearly must support the transformations (existential, social, professional and cultural) that can occur during the training period. The students we work with see these transformations either as a crisis or a transition, and they themselves, are preparing to or already work to support these multi-referential phenomenon that are political, organizational and existential in nature.

It seemed to us that creative insights were more common in students with work experience (professionals who are going back to university) and that they have a strong desire for a transformative process. Many experienced realizations. Not only do they examine the content or the process of their experiences (making personal and professional choices, breaks with the past, parenthood, issues with their position and their relationships at work, possible transfers,

etc.), they look at the very foundation, their frameworks for interpretation that date back to the earliest periods of socialization which determine how subjects act in the world, and these actions are brought into question and sometimes heartily challenged.

4. Transformations in perspectives: openings and limitations

In terms of lessons that can be drawn from this action-research training, we believe that rational dialog as part of training makes it possible to overcome existential and moral crises by existentially recomposing identity, as long as it is part of a program that allows space for self-directed learning and reciprocal cooperative learning, which are both instrumental and emancipatory. This space must be made of moments during which the individuals experience "transitionality" lived through dialog; the main element that the individuals develop and the trainers can work with them to develop through language is a kind of "communicational knowledge". Most importantly is communicative action for creating meaning for action and for group and individual learning as well as for two related key concepts, mutual understanding and individual reflection. Another reason this appears important is that it is related to notions of raised awareness and emancipation, which are closely linked to the transformative perspective itself.

In France as in other parts of Europe, training (professional or otherwise) is still an important driver for individual and group development to help us through "critical" times of economic upset, fear of unemployment, a rise in extremism and other changes. But it can also be instrumentalized as a tool to reproduce and control existing social relationships or as a means of domination, neutralizing individual and collective schemas, perspectives of meaning and systems of representation at a time when they are threatened and when there is no democratic space for existential recomposition for individuals, groups or organizations. The economic and ecological aspects of the crisis often encourage the technical dimension of transformative learning, without linking it to or including inter-individual and social dimensions in the reflective process. Crisis can be a disconnect, a break with the past rather than a bond of meaning that individuals draw from their experiences. It can, in its terrifying aspect, lead organizations, groups and individuals to go back to what they know, to calculated types of actions, to a place where some things are not thought of, indeed cannot be conceived of.

The most extreme types of behavior and the training that comes out of crisis encourage hyper-adaptation, an ideology focused on the short-term, a focus on the need to act now at the expense of a reflective stance. And transformative learning in a time of crisis can be seen as risky. Developing critical thinking may be viewed as unmanageable in the sense that it would create chaos in organizations and in relationships that are based on coercion. It falls to us then in our training programs to deconstruct and reject this representation.

The Proceedings of the International Transformative Learning Conference in Europe
9th International Conference on Transformative Learning

8

References

Barus-Michel, J., Enriquez, E., Levy, A. (2006). *Vocabulaire de psychosociologie, Positions et références*. Toulouse : Erès.

Bertrand, E**.** (2007). *L'expérience formatrice à La Poste : Vers une dialogique entre autoformation émancipatrice et coformation instrumentale*. Université Paris 8 : Thèse de Doctorat en Sciences de l'Education.

Boltanski, L. Chiapello, E. (1999). *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme.* Paris : Gallimard.

Brookfield, S.D. (2005). *The Power of critical theory. Liberating adult Learning and teaching.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Dejours, C. (2010). *Observations cliniques en psychopathologie du travail*. Paris : PUF.

De Lescure, E., Frétigné, C. (2010). *Les métiers de la formation. Approches sociologiques*. Rennes : Presses Universitaires de Rennes.

Eneau, J. (2008). From reciprocity to autonomy, or vice-versa ? The contribution of french personalism to a new perspective of self-directed learning. *Adult Education Quarterly* 58(3), 229-248.

Freire, P. (2006). *Pédagogie de l'autonomie. Savoirs nécessaires à la pratique éducative*. Toulouse : Eres.

Habermas, J. (1976). *Connaissance et intérêt.* Paris : Gallimard.

Honneth, A. (2007). *Reification. A new look at an old idea.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jacques, F. (éd.) (2004). *Education et formation. Essai sur quelques constantes éducatives*. Paris : Parole et Silence.

Kaës, R. (1979). *Crise, rupture et dépassement.* Paris : Dunod.

Mendel, G. (1992). *La société n'est pas une famille. De la psychanalyse à la socio-psychanalyse.* Paris : La Découverte.

Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (and ass.) (2000). *Learning as transformation. Critical perspectives on a theory in progress.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J., Taylor, E.W. (and associates) (2009). *Transformative learning in practice. Insights from community, workplace and higher education.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Morin, E. (1999). *L'Intelligence de la complexité*, Paris, Éditions l'Harmattan.

Morin, E. (2004). *Éthique* (t. 6). Paris : Le Seuil.

Tremblay, N., Eneau, J. (2006). Sujet, société et autoformation - regards croisés du Québec et de france. *Education Permanente*, n° 168. 75-88.

Wulf, C. (1999). *Anthropologie de l'éducation.* Paris : L'Harmattan.