

# The Role of the Holy Spirit in Transformational Learning

By Francis A. Payette

## Introduction

This paper is a pause, a time of reflection on my personal journey of understanding how God wants to convert and transform lost people into bearers of Christ likeness. Prior to and since my graduation from Asbury Theological Seminary, I have been directly and indirectly involved in four church plants and one church resurrection. My aim has always remained consistent, preach and teach the Gospel, admonish every convert to press on to perfection (maturity), equip the saints for service, so that every believer is fully equipped to do God's work ( Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:12,13; 2 Tim.3:17). The issue I struggle with is not staying motivated and keeping my goals central, my struggle has regularly been how will I achieve and carry out my aims for ministry? I have often asked myself and God, how does transformation occur? How does God make saints out of sinners? Will I be able to recognize a transformed person when I see one? Maybe I am just supposed to help people start a spiritual journey, and trust the Spirit for "whatever" happens in their lives? Transformation and the role of the Holy Spirit are the focus of my journey and this paper.

Being involved in church planting for long periods of time one frequently sees lost people embracing Christ and beginning their journey of faith and character transformation. The frustration in ministry comes in knowing how to facilitate transformation and see new converts mature into Christ likeness. Why do some new believers seem to fall away from their new love for Christ? Why do some embrace the creeds and speak the language of transformation but repeatedly display worldly values and sinful behavior? "Why are Christians indistinguishable from the world? Why is today's church so weak? Why

are we able to claim many conversions and enroll many church members but have less and less impact on our culture?" (Boice in Willard 1998, 40). These questions continue to fuel my desire to understand God's work in building His Kingdom. One will not find completed answers in this paper, but I do offer a direction my journey has taken me in becoming an improved equipper, an enhanced teacher, a healthier model of transformation.

The next phase of my journey is my present situation. After being in ministry for seventeen years I have returned to Seminary armed with these questions and others hoping that a PhD will provide insight and strategies in seeing more believers reach a growing maturity in Christ. I re-entered Seminary in the same field of study I left seventeen years ago, Christian education. Although I am the same person who began in this field, I am not bringing the same experiences into my pursuits as I did so many years ago. I have become more honest and more realistic of what the task of ministry involves and doesn't involve. Thus I must confess my shortcomings my insufficiencies when it comes to Christian education and transformation. I really do not understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the transformation process. I feel moderately comfortable expressing the ideas of Piaget in cognitive development. I adequately understand Kohlberg's moral development theories, and even have a handle on Jim Fowler's steps of faith development. When I enter a classroom as the teacher I am armed with the latest learning and teaching theories, I reasonably understand the stages of ego development my students are at. But in all honesty I have inadequate knowledge of the role of the Holy Spirit in the learning and teaching experience, and probably I am not alone in making this confession. Don't get me wrong I know the Holy Spirit is the revealer of truth, the guide, the helper, the anointing, and the sanctifier. But beyond these elementary roles I have more confidence in secular theories of learning and teaching than in knowing the ways of the Spirit in bringing transformation into a reality. As an educator committed to a Wesleyan theology I know the Holy Spirit must shape the way I teach and be the center of any learning theory. But in reality I have

marginalized His role and only welcomed His involvement in the teaching learning process. Julie Gorman speaks candidly to this issue.

Most of us have a rather fuzzy view on the Spirit's role-we are much more confident when it comes to explaining our role as teacher or the learner's role and responsibility in learning. Christian education has always included the shadow of the Spirit somewhere in the process like a validating seal. Since we bear the name "Christian" on our educational endeavors, he must be included somewhere. (Gorman, CEJ 5NS 2001, 38).

Therefore this paper is an attempt to enhance our understanding concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in transformational learning.

## **Survey of Adult Education**

In attempting to understand the work of the Spirit in transformational learning, our focus will primarily be upon adult education. Professional attention in understanding how adults learn became a specific field of study in the 1920s. Three areas of research became the foundation stone; the learner, the learning process, and the context of learning. While many models and theories make up the knowledge base of adult education, three models have gained a significant amount of attention; andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformational perspective. In 1968, Malcolm Knowles projected a European concept, andragogy, into the field of adult education. The ideas of andragogy became a rallying point in an attempt to distinguish and contrast how adults learn, from pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn. Later developments by Knowles shows a move away from dichotomizing pedagogy with andragogy but rather seeing them as two ends of a spectrum (Knowles, 1980, p.43). Knowles established five primary assumptions in describing the adult learner. (1) The adult learner is someone with a deep need to be self-directed and move away from

dependency on a teacher. (2) Adults approach learning with a rich reservoir of experiences that become a resource for learning. (3) Adults become ready to learn when social roles, and circumstances change. Consequently new needs to learn arise. (4) Adults are interested in immediate application of knowledge, and enjoy problem-centered learning. (5) Adults seem to be internally motivated to learn. These assumptions led Knowles to suggest an atmosphere of “adulthood” be established in the classroom. Adults ought to feel accepted, respected, and supported. They manage many aspects of their own lives; hence they are quite capable of assisting in the planning and learning process of the learning experience. There needs to exist “a spirit of mutuality between teachers and students as joint inquirers” (Knowles 1980, p.47).

After much dialogue and debate in the 70s and 80s on the strength of andragogy being a theory of adult learning or simply a set of principles, practices, and assumptions, Knowles came to concur with his critics. Andragogy is less a theory of adult education as it is “a model of assumptions about learning or a conceptual framework that serves as a basis for an emergent theory” (1989, p.112). Criticism also arose challenging Knowles’ basic assumptions of adult learners. Some adults are not independent learners and require structure and dependency on a teacher, while some children can become self-directed learners. Assuming adults are internally motivated to learn does not explain why many adults return to the classroom in order to gain new skills in order to obtain or keep a specific job. The present value andragogy has contributed to adult education is best expressed from author Cyril Houle, Knowles’ mentor. Houle believes the significant value andragogy has offered to educators is that they “should involve learners in as many aspects of their education as possible and in the creation of a climate in which they can most fruitfully learn” (Houle 1996, p.30).

A second focus of adult education known as self-directed learning was birthed about the same time Knowles introduced andragogy. This model also was an attempt to distinguish differences between adult learners from children. The underlying assumptions were similar to andragogy in that adults

become more self-directed as they mature. The goals of self-directed learning varied depending on the educator's orientation. The humanist approach believed the goal is the development of the learner's capability to be self-directed. An additional goal of some educators believed that self-directed learning ought to promote emancipatory learning resulting in political and social action. A third goal of self-directed learning came from a constructivist view fostering transformational learning as offered by Jack Mezirow. This approach focused on critical reflection in an attempt to recognize assumptions, needs, wants and interests. Self-directed learning can be characterized by the use of learning contracts and self-planned learning projects.

In conclusion, adult education remains a professional field of study making a distinction from general education and specifically from childhood education. The two pillars of adult learning theory remain andragogy and self-directed learning. The primary theory of learning that dominated the 90s emerged from these two pillars of adult education called perspective transformation theory. Jack Mezirow is responsible for this approach to learning using critical reflection and constructive discourse. Our attention will focus upon this approach and an attempt to understand the role of the Spirit.

### **Brief Background of Transformational Theory**

Transformational learning theory has been articulated in four general categories (Dirkx, 1998). The first grouping comes from Freire's ideas of emancipatory education. While working with poor Brazilians in the 70s he realized that education consisted of a "banking method" of learning, which accentuated passive listening and keeping students disenfranchised. Freire believed the purpose of education was liberation from unjust social structures and empowering students to transform their culture. Reflection or conscientization on unreasonable working conditions and pay inequalities was the method used to bring awareness and transformation. The second type of transformational learning theory is best seen in the ideas of Daloz's writings which take a developmental approach to learning. As a college

professor he uses narrative to demonstrate how students develop through transitional periods of life. This approach sees transformation process as intuitive, holistic, and contextually based. The third type of orientation is an association between spirituality and learning expressed by Dirkx and Healy. Transformational learning has a spiritual aspect where imagination focusing on feelings, images, and the soul. The final category is perspective transformational learning theory established by Jack Mezirow and associates (1991, 2000).

### **Primary Concepts of Transformational Theory**

Jack Mezirow (1927-) initiated and developed the most comprehensive theoretical structure of perspective transformational theory in adult education. Before his retirement in 1993, Mezirow was chairman of the Department of Higher and Adult Education at Teachers College at Columbia University. He wanted adults to have well formulated beliefs, be able to assess experiences and their contexts, and make informed decisions. Crucial to these learning goals, one needs to understand how adults make meaning out of information, experiences, and ideas. Hence, Mezirow suggests adults become aware of their assumptions and habits of thinking through the process of critical reflection and constructive discourse. He writes "Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide to future action" (Mezirow 2000, p.5).

Adults establish meaning perspectives, a global more inclusive worldview, by filtering experiences and sense impressions through their frame of reference. This frame of reference consists of two aspects, first, habits of the mind, where broad generalized taken for granted beliefs and assumptions exist. The second aspect is point of view, where feelings, attitudes, beliefs, judgments, and criteria for evaluating create clusters of meaning schemes, a specific framework of assumptions and expectations, usually operating at the unconscious level. As we hear information, encounter new experiences, we process

these ideas and impressions through our frame of reference and construct meaning perspectives. Transformation occurs when we establish new frames of reference, elaborate on existing frames, transform habits of the mind, or transform our points of view. Thus transformation results in our perspectives or worldview changing. This learning process is facilitated and initiated through critical reflection and constructive discourse. ([See Diagram](#))

Mezirow reasons that reflection and discourse usually begins with a disorienting dilemma that causes us to assess our assumptions and beliefs. He feels adults have uncritically assimilated from others: values, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and meanings into their frame of reference. Our frames of reference often reflect our cultural worldviews, personal beliefs derived from parents and caregivers, incidental learning, and psychological experiences. Thus adults are making decisions and choices not based upon well thought-out ideas, but through the lens of another's beliefs and false assumptions. Adults need to become aware, not just what they believe, but what they used in their thinking processes to arrive at their belief. Mezirow writes, "Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action" (2000, p.7,8).

### Disorienting Dilemma

Perspective transformation is said to be triggered when an adult experiences a significant personal event, a personal crisis, an internal search for meaning, labeled by Mezirow as a disorienting dilemma. This triggering event may be a swift experience one encounters or a singular significant occurrence over a long period of time. Research has identified two types of disequilibrium (disorienting dilemma) that were essential in initiating a change in perspective. First, was an external event (violence, crime, loss) that forced an internal dilemma. Next, was an internal disillusionment (faith in an institution)

where expectations and solutions were not welcomed (Scott, 1991). Irrespective of current findings there is partial understanding on why some disorienting dilemmas lead to transformation and others do not. Some people can experience serious loss in life and seem able to glide right through adversity without being changed by the loss. Other people enter into serious reflection after a brief encounter with someone or hearing a message. Exactly how the disorienting dilemma functions remains uncertain, but the consensus finds agreement with the triggering aspect leading to critical reflection.

### Critical Reflection

Vital to a transformational theory of adult learning is critical reflection. Assisting learners to become critically reflective of their assumptions and habits of the mind is essential to adult education. Oftentimes adults are unaware of beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies that govern their own decision making process. Repeated destructive behaviors can be the result of false, sinful, and unbiblical beliefs that shape one's frame of reference. The task of the educator, pastor, or counselor is to become a critical friend and serve as a critical mirror and move the adult learner down the path to transformation. Mezirow communicated clearly the function of the educator. "...every adult educator has a central responsibility for fostering critical reflection and transformative learning (Merriam, 1995, p.124). Many of the contributors to transformational learning theory view the role of the educator as one of co-learner, guide, role model for critical reflection, and empathic provocateur. The goal of the teacher is to enter in to a discourse of trust. This can be achieved when the teacher becomes an active listener and begins to hear and understand the meaning perspectives of the learner. The teacher as a listener becomes focused and actively follows the sequence of thought of the learner. "At the same time, the active listener hears critically and analytically, reflecting the ideas with fresh words" (Seymour, Crain, Crocket p.140). Listening can empower the transformational process as now the educator can begin to ask the sensitive questions and reflect upon unhealthy beliefs and behaviors. Students usually do not enter the classroom ready to do reflection nor have the skills to enter into



critical discourse. Thus the teacher must model critical reflection by sharing their own transformational journey and explaining the cardinal elements of critical reflection through constructive discourse.

Critical reflection generally defined is that process where we examine and critically assess dearly held beliefs, assumptions, assimilated values, and apparent common sense wisdom that shape our frame of reference used for interpreting experiences and information and creating our perspectives of others and our self. The purpose of critical reflection is to discover unhealthy belief systems and feelings that may cause harm to the adult learner, interpersonal relationships or society and welcome new or elaborate on old frames of reference that will lead to transformation. Critical thinking often becomes a cognitive process whereas critical reflection is both a cognitive and affective exercise. The feelings and attitudes one carries often determines what one believes and if they will open their heart to transformation. The focus of being a Christian educator becomes holistic in our approach to adult education, when we are able to communicate rationally the claims of Christ as being essential, but also engage the adult heart into a love relationship with the personal Christ. "Intellect works in concert with feeling, so if I hope to open my students' minds, I must open their emotions as well" (Palmer, 1998, 63).

For the Wesleyan educator, Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience become the prevailing criteria learners should use to assess their frames of reference. Critical reflection in the hands of some educators can be dangerous. Those with an agenda far left or right can attempt to indoctrinate and manipulate learning. Reflection for the Christian educator means measuring one's assumptions with the clear teachings of Scripture. Our assumptions are inaccurate when they conflict with holy writ and can not be confirmed through the Christian community. The tremendous need for Christian educators to thoroughly know and understand God's revelation and be able to communicate it clearly is paramount when attempting to rebuild frames of reference. Contributors to transformational theory have offered a variety of methods in facilitating critical reflection. Strategies include journaling, doing

life histories, probing metaphors, making extreme statements, role playing, unanticipated classroom activities, staging unusual events, times of classroom silence for thinking and feeling, and creating an atmosphere that allows for critical questions (Clark 1993, 55, Cranton 1994, 188-89).

A significant contribution Wesleyan theology can make to transformational learning theory is doing critical reflection and constructive discourse within the context of a loving, caring, holy community of believers being led by God's transforming Spirit. Small group accountability, societies, and class meetings have been the impetus to much of the spiritual development of Wesleyan traditions. Jack Seymour states "...personal meanings are validated and reinterpreted in community" (Seymour, Crain, Crockett, 1993, p.43). I suggest a return to small group accountability with a commitment to reflect and discuss invalidated and unhealthy assumptions and meaning schemes.

### **Critical Reflection, Scripture, and the Holy Spirit**

God spoke through the prophet Haggai during the rebuilding of the Temple and said, "Give careful thought to your ways." *Haggai 1:5,7* (NIV). The context of God speaking was the lack of progress made on rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. The people had given much time and resources to their own homes while God's Temple remained in ruins. As a result of this negligence, God called forth a drought on the land and brought a lack of enjoyment and satisfaction to food, clothes, and wages. (*Haggai 1:6, 7, 11*). God wanted them to give *careful thought* to their personal life and social conditions, and ask themselves why do we drink and are never full? Why do we earn wages but seem to never have enough to get by? Why do we pay attention to our clothes but are never warm? Hopefully they would realize God has not allowed them to enjoy these things because His Temple and worship have been ignored. This is a biblical example of critical reflection and the prophet Haggai entering into constructive discourse by asking them self-reflective questions. The same self scrutiny God required during the rebuilding of the Temple is needed today in order to understand one's

unbiblical ways of perceiving reality and livingly contrary to Christ likeness. Teachers ought to foster continuity with Haggai of encouraging adults to consider their ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling in light of God's revelation.

The Lord Jesus often asked penetrating questions to his listeners and followers. He insisted that people count the cost of becoming a disciple and heavily weigh the implications of being a learner. Robert Pazmino writes, "Jesus expected his students to search their minds and hearts in relation to his teaching and to consider the realities of life. In encouraging others to think for themselves, Jesus posed questions and allowed for questioning (Pazmino, p.73, 2001). Christ promised His disciples that questions would be answered and Truth be made known. "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). When adults engage the critical reflection process the Spirit is present to guide one not only into truth, but also gain insight into false assumptions and unbiblical beliefs. Truth is a representation of how things actually are. The Spirit will direct us to see life and belief systems the way they really exist. The Christian's transformational perspective will occur when we embrace God's perspective on the world and our lifestyle. Jesus promised the Spirit would come and teach us truth, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26). John further informs us that Christians have the anointing, the Spirit, to teach and keep believers from believing lies and those attempting to lead us astray by teaching lies (I John 2:26, 27). As the Spirit guides us into Truth, He will enable us to discern false assumptions that cause evil in our lives and produce biblical reality leading to doing that which is good. "But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." (Hebrews 5:14).

Emancipation leading to transformation is the work of the Spirit, Jesus promised, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John8:32). Freedom from a sinful and inaccurate frame of reference will lead to spiritual maturity and sanctification. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is

freedom" (2 Cor.3: 17). Spirit freedom leads to transformation into Christ likeness, reflecting the Lord's glory. (2 Cor. 3:18) Paul calls us to keep in step with the Spirit and live by the Spirit (Galatians 5:25) resulting in fruit of the Spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal.5:22). Spirit transformation frees us from a frame of reference and perspective held captive by the sinful mind which produces sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, and orgies (Galatians 5:19). Some authors of transformational learning theory explain emancipation as being freed from unjust social institutions, liberated from gender roles, and unchained from political structures. But Spirit produced freedom opens the eyes of our heart so we may know Christ better, know the hope to which we are called, know the riches of His inheritance, and know His incomparably great power (Ephesians 1:17-19).

Jesus' public ministry begins with the Spirit's presence at His baptism where "the Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove" (Luke 3:22). Jesus being "full of the Holy Spirit" (Luke 4:1), was driven into the wilderness for forty days where He was tempted. Jesus leaves the wilderness and begins to teach in Galilee being "filled with the power of the Spirit, he began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone" (Luke 4:14-15). Jesus announces the Spirit's anointing upon Him as He reads Isaiah 61

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Luke 4:18, 19)

Jesus was teaching filled with the Spirit's empowerment and the Spirit's anointing allowed Him to teach resulting in liberation of the poor, captives, blind, and oppressed. Paul, in Ephesians 1:17-19, was praying for the believers in Ephesus to experience what Isaiah prophesized would happen when

the Spirit came upon the Messiah, true emancipation. John informs us that Jesus was given the Spirit without any limits. (John 3:34) Peter preaching to Cornelius' household sums it up: "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

### Critical reflection and resistance

When Christian educators filled with the Spirit ask adults to *take careful thought of their ways*, and restructure frames of reference, resistance may occur. When the Spirit illuminates the mind and convicts the heart, insights arise that often challenge people's long held cherished beliefs. Teachers attempting to reveal unbiblical assumptions and values can create an emotional experience that becomes threatening to adult learners. Asking learners to take action on reflective, Spirit led insights can be a threat to psychological security that transformational learning imposes.

Adults will resist contradictions to their beliefs and will deny discrepancies between new learning and previous knowledge. In response to a challenge to their assumptions, many learners will entrench themselves even more firmly in their belief system and become hostile or withdrawn in the learning environment (Cranton 1994, 18).

Despite Jesus being empowered with the Holy Spirit, His hearers in Nazareth rejected His teaching and ministry. The Spirit's presence and power were no guarantee His words and works would be embraced. A partnership between the adult learner and Spirit seems necessary in order for transformational learning to occur. Concerning John the Baptist, Jesus said he was the Elijah who was to come. The issue at hand was their willingness to accept this teaching and having ears to hear what the Spirit was saying (Matthew 11:13-15). Wesleyan educators are privileged to teach in the same power and Spirit the Lord Jesus did. But this is no guarantee hearers will welcome transformational

insights and reframing of cognitive structures. When meaning perspectives are challenged, we risk meaninglessness and social disruption; our temples crumble (Seymour, Crain, Crockett, 1993, p.48). Obviously the Pharisees remained hard hearted and rejected critical reflection and continued firm in their expectations of the Messiah. But who would expect the disciples becoming hard hearted? Jesus powerfully feed five thousand people with two fish and five loaves in the presence of the disciples but they were not able to comprehend this miracle. We see them terrified after witnessing Christ walking on water and calming the storm. Mark informs us that they were amazed and hard hearted because they had not understood the miracle of the loaves (Mark 6:52).

Resistance to critical reflection and an unwillingness to reframe assumptions needs to convene with a teacher who intercedes for their students regularly. Modeling followed by imitation may be the best avenue for an unwilling heart to change cherished beliefs that are unbiblical. As the Christian educator allows Scripture to transform their beliefs and behaviors adults may emulate the critical reflection process. Almost twenty years ago I wrote on the inside cover of my Bible a reminder to myself as I serve the people of God; I am not a picture of perfection but a portrait of a process.

The assumptions of Knowles, mentioned earlier, provide for the educator a constant reminder to encourage adults to take responsibility for their theological understanding and their spiritual development. Adults desire to be autonomous and become self-directed in learning so they ought to be challenged to take complete responsibility in their transformational process. Adults need to be made aware that resistance to transformation grieves the Spirit and wounds the heart of the Father (Eph 4:30). Welcoming transformation is a difficult process, but rejecting the Spirit's work can result in even greater pain. Heart ache results when we refuse the abundant life promised and relinquish the purpose for which we were created, Christ likeness. But may we never surrender to resistance and be captured by doubt as a Christian educator. Long before we enter the classroom the Spirit has

already been active in the hearts of the learners. The triggering event that causes disequilibrium may be determined by the measure of resistance adult learners portray.

### **Truth experienced in the Spirit**

The Spirit reveals Christ to us. He does not speak on His own but speaks the Truth of Christ and brings glory to Christ. (John 14:13, 14) Jesus said He is the Truth, thus when the Spirit reveals Truth to the adult learner He is making Christ known. One is not being confronted with a syllogism, proposition, or a set of logical conclusions. The Spirit is encountering us with Christ Himself. Hence, when one welcomes truth, and changes perceptions, and frames of references, they are welcoming Christ as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did not say "I will speak true words to you" or "I will tell you about the truth"; he claimed to embody truth in his person. To those who wished to know truth, Jesus did not offer propositions to be tested by logic or data to be tested in the laboratory. He offered himself and his life (Palmer 1993, 42).

Knowing the Truth is an invitation extended by the Spirit to encounter the living God through Jesus Christ. Adult learners are not biblically transformed by just understanding the logic and reason of the Christian faith, but by personally encountering the living Truth and responding with change in perceptions, behaviors and loves. Teaching for transformation requires that we enable adults to experience Christ through the work of the Spirit. "Gazing at the glory of the Lord, we are changed into His likeness little by little. In effect, we gradually become what we behold" (Pinnock, 1996, 174) (2 Cor. 3:18). Communicating Christ theoretically, and conceptually, apart from my inner experience will not result in transformation. Transformation takes place when we present the reasonableness of who Christ is and the personal encounter Christ welcomes us to experience. Julie Gormon writes "The

essence of teaching is encountering God in Jesus Christ through the manifestation of the Spirit who calls us to God consciousness" (CEJ 5NS 2001, 47). The ministry of teaching that brings transformation will be absolutely biblical as it flows out of the relationship the teacher has developed in Christ by walking in the Spirit. As deep and as close as my heart is to God in loving and obeying Him will at times determine the richness and response of transformation in the adult learner.

### **Effective strategies for critical reflection**

In transformational theory the disorienting dilemma resulting in disequilibrium is the key which triggers critical reflection. When adults sense their equilibrium is being upset a readiness to learn may be available. They begin to search for help, answers, and direction in order to make meaning of the quandary. At times these disorienting events may be Spirit inspired with intentions of fostering spiritual transformation. Christian educators need to work in concurrence with the Spirit's purposes by prayerfully listening to adults and being sensitive to their assumptions and perspectives on the dilemma. Often times adults seek to have their immediate needs addressed and seek some type of relief of being in a state of disequilibrium. Educators must attempt to provide caring support to the learner while moving them beyond the need for immediate relief to a place of serious reflection and listening to what the Spirit is saying in the midst of the dilemma. We must avoid rushing too quickly in an attempt to deliver people from their disorienting dilemmas and crises. The work of the Spirit involves orchestrating those very dilemmas we are trying to rescue people from. Thus the need for the educator to be Spirit led as they attempt to discern what direction to take in ministering to an individual.

Adults display readiness for transformation when they willingly enter into critical reflection and educators can engage them in constructive discourse. Becoming a friendly mirror to the adult may help them see attitudes, rationalizations, and habitual ways of thinking and acting as the educator



verbally mirrors the adult's frame of reference (Brookfield 1987). Constructive discourse attempts to ask questions designed to educe assumptions rather than gain information. The goal is to stir into question cherished beliefs that distort reality and prevent transformation. Adult learners need to feel non-threatened as important personal issues are brought forth by a loving Spirit-led educator. Teachers must approach learners with sensitivity as they seek to ask evocative questions that are specific and easily comprehended by the adult learner.

Constructive discourse can also be entered into by asking learners to role play a debate by defending a position one opposes. Brainstorming techniques that cause adults to envision an alternative future, or envision a future without the disorienting dilemma. Allowing classmates to offer analysis of relevant issues can be a catalyst for seeking transformation. Entering into constructive discourse with adult learners is not an automatic process that happens just because a teacher states it as a learning goal. The idea of questioning one's beliefs and assumptions can be seen as impolite and maybe an affront. A student willing to examine cherished beliefs has entered into an openness of willing to say they were mistaken about a specific idea or belief. In order to move students to willingness and openness takes a context of relationships built on trust, respect, and confidentiality. Adults have an emotional investment in their perspectives and assumptions and when one questions or confronts those assumptions a feeling of losing the investment may occur. Constructive discourse needs to avoid the teacher coming across as adversarial and confrontational. The Spirit centered class allows the Spirit to convict and confront as Truth is discussed and encountered by the learner and teacher.

A component of constructive discourse calls for a question and answer sequence where a willingness to observe Haggai's words to "Give careful thought to your ways" (Haggai 1:5, 7) has been agreed upon by both teacher and learner. Teachers move beyond asking questions that function as information seeking to questions that call for critical analysis and reflection. The goal is to unpack beliefs in order to understand assumptions so they may be evaluated in light of God's revelation. The

questioning phase of discourse requires one to reveal, scrutinize, dissect, explain, and reflect on cherished beliefs.

## Conclusion

This article attempts to move the teaching learning process to a Spirit centered focus by implementing transformational perspective learning through critical reflection and constructive discourse. Early on I asked how transformation occurs. My response considers transformational theory as one way to answer this question by realizing that transformation is the work and goal of the Spirit as we engage adult learners in examining their unbiblical assumptions and adopt a biblical perspective that we can live and act upon. May we no longer pay lip service by marginalizing the role of the Holy Spirit in learning and may we continue in a life time pursuit of knowing how God transforms believers.

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