Analyzing the occurrence transformative learning in faith-based, postsecondary adult degree completion programs utilizing the learning activities survey

by

Kevin H. Mokhtarian

B.S., Friends University, 1995
M.S., Kansas State University, 2010

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

2020

Abstract

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The purpose of this study, using the LAS, is to understand whether adult students in cohort-based, degree completion programs experience transformative learning and if it can be associated with learning activities. Students were surveyed and asked to report whether they experienced transformative learning in their educational program, outside of their experience in the program, or not at all.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

This study examined whether adults enrolled in cohort-based, degree completion education programs at faith-based colleges and universities, experienced transformative learning, and if such experiences were predicted or explained by participation in various learning activities. Since Mezirow (1978) articulated the theory of transformative learning, it has become one of the most examined adult learning theories of the last 25 years (Cheney, 2010; Taylor, 2007).

Publications reflecting transformative learning have doubled every five years over the past 15 years (Taylor & Cranton, 2013) and within a five-year period "…119 articles use the term in their title and over 1300 referred to the theory in the text of the article" (p. 34). According to E.W. Taylor (2007), transformative learning is a growing theory meant to assist in explaining adult learning and is supported by over 40 recent studies. E.W. Taylor's (2007) work affirms Mezirow's concept of transformative learning and its relevance as an adult learning theory "…through its stability over time, its relationship to expanding the self and pursuit of autonomy, and the applicability for informing classroom practice" (E.W. Taylor, 2007, p. 185).

"Transformative learning may be understood as the epistemology of how adults learn to think for themselves rather than act upon the assimilated beliefs, values, feelings and judgments of others" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 1). The notion of relationship and its role in fostering transformative learning has been a major research focus (Taylor & Snyder, 2011). "Relationships…provide insight into the importance of social acceptance by peers as significant for the transformative process" (Taylor & Snyder, 2011, p. 317). This study explored the role of

relationships via the cohort experience in adult degree completion programs, as well as the role of specific learning experiences in fostering a transformative learning experience.

Background

The number of adults seeking a formal education continues to grow (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011). Over the past 14 years the number of students returning to college grew by 45% for adults aged 25-34 and 35% for adults 35 and older (Hussar & Bailey, 2013). Between 2010 and 2021, adult enrollment numbers were predicted to continue to grow at a cumulative rate of 20 and 25%. Along with the growth in adult education enrollment comes a desire for programs that meet personal preferences of scheduling (both meeting time and length of program), cost, and location (Aslanian & Giles, 2008). As adult enrollment has grown, educational institutions devised programs that meet the needs of flexible schedules and delivery formats (Boden & Spikes, 2009). This growth placed pressure on program developers to meet competing priorities. Courses for adults must achieve educational and institutional objectives while satisfying individual needs as students attempt to balance a return to school with a broad range of work and/or social responsibilities (Eduventures, 2008).

Introduction to Mezirow

Mezirow (2003) wrote, "the goal of adult education is to assist learners to more fully realize their capability for autonomous thought while pursuing their own learning objectives" (p. 4). Mezirow's (1978; 1981) theory builds on the instrumental and communicative types of learning articulated by Habermas (1984). Instrumental learning involves manipulation of the environment in such a way that performance outcomes may be predicted (Mezirow, 2003) and is measured via assessment, a recitation of what was taught (Glisczinski, 2008). Most students participate in conventional educational experiences that are instrumental in nature (Glisczinski,

2008); students are provided with information deemed critical for learning and prove their knowledge through assessment and evaluation in what Freire (1970) identified as the banking concept of education. Teachers are often viewed as experts by students in that they share content that students are asked to accept and which is validated through repetition, recitation, and testing (Knowles, 1980; Monts, 2000). Mezirow (1990) contrasts instrumental learning to communicative learning and promotes communicative learning as central to transformative learning. Communicative learning occurs as a result of assessing the message, meaning, and authenticity of communication between two or more individuals (Mezirow, 2000).

Communicative learning supports the concept of transformative learning as a unique adult learning theory since transformative learning relies on dialog (Taylor & Laros, 2014), and includes critical reflection and critical self-reflection which are key components in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003). According to Imel (1995), adults have grown accustomed to learning to become subject matter experts which may create a conflict with adult education that strives to provide a more inclusive, communicative, transformative experience (Cranton, 2002; Dirkx, 1998; Mezirow, 1990). A major focus of higher education programs for adults is to provide flexible programs for working adults that utilize instrumental learning to meet societal, economic demands, focusing on content at the expense of communicative learning (Foley, 1998).

Purpose of Education

One historical purpose of education is to promote democratic participation in a civil society (Glisczinksi, 2008; Schugurensky, 2005). The precursor to that outcome is emancipatory education (Inglis, 1997; Mezirow, 1990), and Mezirow (1981) stated that, "some readers will recognize the concept of emancipatory action as synonymous with 'transformative learning'" (p.

3). Education and a civil society are strongly linked (Brookfield, 2005; McClusky, 1947; Mezirow, 2003) and Nussbaum (2006) wrote that, "public education is crucial to the health of democracy" (p. 385). Due to a perceived loss of democratic participation and involvement in a civil society (de la Torre, Nabudere, & Walters, 1997; Gutmann & McPherson, 1994; Sehr, 1997), there is renewed emphasis in education on civil society and democratic practice (Hall, McKnight, & Pandak, 1999). A shift has occurred where education is seen as being a means toward achieving individual and economic gains (Beista, 2006; Sehr, 1997).

> Whereas in the past lifelong learning was seen as a personal good and an inherent aspect of democratic life, today lifelong learning is increasingly understood in terms of the formation of human capital and as an investment in economic development. (Beista, 2006, p. 169)

Lange (2004) conducted a study to "explore the potential of critical transformative learning for revitalizing citizen action…Democracy is fundamentally hinged on the citizen's ability to play an informed and active role in determining how to live together in society" (pp. 121-122). In another study Hall et al. (1999) examined the concept of civil society and "the role of adult educators and adult education in shaping it" (p. 1). Transformative learning offers the opportunity for growth in democratic involvement (Mezirow, 1991). "That is why transformative learning, with its emphasis on contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions and validating meaning through discourse, is so important" (p. 1). In Mezirow's (1990) framework transformative learning is linked to emancipatory education and he described transformative learning as an emancipatory process ultimately led to a restructuring of personal understanding and an awareness of the constraints in how people see themselves and their relationships.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning offers a path away from instrumental learning toward learning that engages students to find compromise to improve human interaction (Mezirow, 1981) and to move away from the "narrow world of technical answers" (p. 3) to a more personal experience (Hall et al., 1999). Transformative learning includes components inherent in and critical to adult learning, including "…experiential learning, critical self-reflection, and rational discourse that can be stimulated by people, events, or changes in a context that challenges the learner's basic assumptions of the world" (Brown, 2005, p. 23). Individuals who have the opportunity to communicate, share ideas, and form-revised points of view have the potential to move toward a more inclusive perspective (Brown, 2005).

Habermas (1991) considered interaction with others critical to problem solving in society and names the place where interaction takes place the public sphere.

> By "the public sphere" we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed…A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. (Habermas, Lennox, S., & Lennox, F., 1974, p. 49)

Dewey (1916) argued that "a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 4). A report by Sandlin, Clark, and Wright (2011) described the role of public pedagogy and the adult development that may occur in public settings through discourse. Sandlin et al. (2011) raised the question of how adult learning and development occur within the contexts of public pedagogy, and whether this opportunity is being lost within adult education and, therefore, hindering transformational learning. Mayo (2003) argued that adult programs that revitalize the public sphere are important in an effort to push back against "the privatization and commodification" of education (p. 40). If

public discourse opportunities are disappearing, the adult education setting can facilitate discourse and reflection, yet in a rush to meet market demands institutions may place economics ahead of education and inadvertently facilitate instrumental learning instead of communicative learning (Mayo, 2003).

Degree Completion Programs for Adults

Maehl (2004) examined the post-World War II growth in adult education participation and the methods institutions employed to meet a sudden demand for programs that catered to adult students. Maehl (2004) pointed out that it was in the 1960s the phrase nontraditional learner was first coined by the Commission on Non-Traditional Study (Gould, 1973). The institutions examined in Maehl's (2004) study can trace the roots of their adult degree completion programs to the early 1980's.

> As adult enrollments grew, institutions found that the new entrants brought considerable amounts of previously earned academic credit or even associate's degrees. Some institutions recognized this circumstance and adjusted their programs to help learners complete baccalaureate degrees more expeditiously. (Maehl, 2004, p. 10)

This new adult degree completion model of education expanded rapidly during the early 1980's (J. Taylor, 2000). This model became common as the result of a grant program designed to support over 20 institutions in the revision of the educational administration programs (Maher, 2005). Degree completion programs for adults became a key source of income growth for smaller colleges struggling to compete in the growing field of adult education (Tweedell, 2000). While adult degree completion programs (ADCP) date back to the 1970's, they gained in popularity in the early 2000's (J. Taylor, 2000). An important benefit of many of the ADCP models "was the formation of groups that moved through the program as teams" (Maehl, 2004,

p. 11), and the adult degree completion program utilizing a cohort model found its place in the new concept of education for the nontraditional learner.

Cohort Model. The cohort model has grown as a model for educating adults (Imel, 2002; Maher, 2005; Spaid & Duff, 2009). This model brings together a group of students who are ready to begin their educational pursuits who start the program at the same time and move together through the entirety of the program (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; McCarthy, Trenga, & Wenger, 2005). This model meets objectives for both students and the institution (Spaid & Duff, 2009). Hanover Research (2012) showed that three of the top factors for adult students to enroll in a degree program are a convenient time and place for classes; flexible pacing for completing a program; and time required to complete program. The cohort model meets these enrollment factors (Spaid & Duff, 2009; Wheelan & Lisk, 2000). The model also assists the institutions that utilize this model in meeting certain objectives, which include the ability to start a group as soon as enough students are enrolled; more efficient scheduling and tracking; more efficient faculty hiring and preparation; and more predictable and stable income (Maher, 2005; Spaid & Duff, 2009; Wheelan & Lisk, 2000). Cranton (1996) pointed out that group learning is important to the process of transformative learning as individuals work together to construct knowledge, and argues that "transformative group learning promotes the empowerment of learners; the goal is freedom from the constraint of not knowing" (p. 29), which is a form of emancipatory learning.

While the cohort-based adult degree completion program model offers economic benefits for the institution, it also facilitates a method of instruction that has the potential to benefit students in ways other than simply conveying subject matter (Spaid & Duff, 2009). For example, in a cohort, classmates are known to one another as each class begins, eliminating the need to learn new names and faces for each class (Spaid & Duff, 2009). Therefore, collaboration

is more likely to take place, providing a supportive learning environment (Spaid & Duff, 2009). Cohorts often become sources of support and encouragement as students learn to work together (Imel, 2002), and provide "…clear structuring and course sequencing, a supportive peer group, and increased contact with instructors" (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001, pp. 605-606). In addition, cohorts enable the critical examination of belief systems within an equitable environment (Choy, 2009). Choy (2009) suggested in her study that cohort members utilize Mezirow's (2003) learning concepts; "during the course of [the cohort's] study, there was strong evidence of communicative learning and rational discourse, and more specifically critical dialectical discourse" (p. 9).

Criticism of Degree Completion Programs. Criticism of degree completion programs often centers on the idea that earning a degree has become a business transaction (Brookfield, 2003). Adult students select programs based on features related to schedules, location, and other convenience factors, however, the structure itself limits the students' ability to grow (Kasworm, 2003a). While there are benefits to the student in terms of cost, convenient location, or schedule, after completing the program, students often feel that the program lacks quality and substance, and while the program appealed on the basis of consumerism, it does not fulfill the student's educational needs and desires (Kasworm, 2003a).

Despite this deficit in meeting the educational needs and desires of the adult student (Kasworm, 2003a), the use of ADCP continues to grow in order to keep up with consumer demand, not unlike consumer-good organizational counterparts (Kasworm, 2003b). The result of this practice is that "…education in and of itself becomes a secondary goal to education as a good or service" (Nguyen, 2013, p. 202).

Markets Driving the Growth of Adult Education

Driving growth in adult education is the changing economy and the shortage of qualified employees to fill jobs (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013; Chao, DeRocco, & Flynn, 2007). In one study, 70% of the employers surveyed "…believe that employees need continuous education just to keep pace with the demands of their current jobs" (Destiny Solutions, 2012, p. 2). By 2020, it is estimated there will be a shortage of seven million skilled workers available to fill jobs in the economy (Destiny Solutions, 2012). In a summary of education in the age of technology, Collins and Halverson (2010) point out that "education has long been a path to economic advancement" (p. 24).

It is estimated 23% of all mid-level job positions require at least a bachelor's degree and another 22% require at least a master's degree or professional licensure (Destiny Solutions, 2012, p. 3). In contrast, only 38% of Americans possess at least an associate's degree (Destiny Solutions, 2012, p. 2). A report by the Center on Education and the Workforce at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute (Carnevale et al., 2013) indicated that, "by 2020, 65% of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or training" (p. 15). The need for further education will continue to grow as adult workers face the economic reality of the educational requirements of the job market (Carnevale et al., 2013; Lacey & Wright, 2009). In the Lifelong Education and Labor Market Needs survey (Destiny Solutions, 2012), "employers agreed that education provides significant value to the company throughout the employee lifecyle [*sic*]" (p. 4).

There are economic reasons, then, as well as societal reasons driving the need for responsive, responsible, degree completion programs (Foster, 2012). It might be assumed that businesses require education that focuses only on task-oriented endeavors, or instrumental learning. However, the bigger picture of what it takes to stay competitive indicates

communicative learning may be the better method. "Lifelong learners demonstrate ambition, leadership, and a desire to remain ahead of industry trends and advancements…Continuing education is integral to the success of the employee, the company, and society at large" (Destiny Solutions, 2012, p. 7).

Transformative Learning and the Cohort Model of Instruction

Collaborative learning is linked to the cohort model of instruction (Brooks, 1998; Drago-Severson, et al., 2001; Lawrence, 1997). Lawrence (1997) examined adult cohorts as sites for collaborative learning. Among Lawrence's findings was that the cohort experienced a collaborative process and "their individual and collective knowledge and experiences are combined to contribute to the learning process" (p. 3). Brooks (1998) argued that cohorts promote collaboration and that collaborative activities create bonds that are fundamental to the cohort experience. When relationships within the cohort are well formed the opportunity for collaborative learning is enhanced (Brooks, 1998). This is affirmed in a study by Drago-Severson et al., (2001) who found "academic learning was enhanced by…participation in collaborative learning activities within their cohorts" (p. 3). The results of the study conducted by Drago-Severson et al., (2001) indicate the cohort and collaborative learning experiences are linked and that "collaboration with other cohort learners often became the catalyst for growth" (p. 5).

Scribner and Donaldson (2001) identified a link between transformative learning and the concept of using a cohort-based instructional format, in that

> …the structure of cohort programs can almost naturally bring about transformative learning in the affective (person-to-person) domain…on the other hand, transformative learning in the cognitive (or person-to-content) domain…will require more forethought

> and reflection on the part of instructors…so that reflection, critical reflection, and transformative learning will occur (p. 631).

Cohort-based degree completion programs provide a method for efficiently delivering course content while satisfying a wide array of student and institutional needs (Drago-Severson, Helsing, Kegan, Popp, Broderick, & Portnow, 2001; Maher, 2005; Spaid & Duff, 2009). A potential conflict arises as institutions strive to meet the demand for degree completion programs (Nyugen, 2013).

> In a report on utilizing effective groups in collaborative learning, Dirkx (1998) wrote that using groups to foster collaborative learning involves far more than putting four or five students together and giving them a task or exercise to complete…to make learning truly collaborative, both learners and teachers need to let go of long-held beliefs about what is to be learned and how. (pp. 1-2)

While not addressing cohorts in particular, Dirkx (1998) pointed to characteristics of the group that are similar to the cohort, namely, "…members know each other, know some things about group process and structure, and demonstrate high levels of cohesiveness" (p. 6). McCarthy, et al (2005) pointed out that the definition of cohort has expanded to include collaborative projects and that the formation of a cohort mirrors that of group formation.

The cohort has the potential to facilitate transformation. "Collaborative learning assumes…that knowledge is a consensus among the members of a community of knowledgeable peers – something people construct by talking together and reaching agreement" (Bruffee, 1993, p. 3). Cohort learning moves toward discourse as a component of its instructional format. "Teaching and learning in a collaborative model shifts from knowledge transfer (transmission and reception) or discussion (cooperative model) toward all participants sharing construction of

their knowledge" (Moore, 2005, p. 82), representing a move from strictly instrumental learning to a communicative learning model. "In communicative learning, emphasis is on critical reflection and critical self-reflection" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60). Critical reflection and critical self-reflection open the door to emancipatory education as learners "…explore alternative perspectives, transform old ways of understanding, and act on new perspectives" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 18).

In detailing three types of group learning, Cranton (1996) described collaborative learning where adults work together to "…discover knowledge rather than to discover objective truths" (p. 27). Cranton went on to identify transformative group learning, which occurs "…when people revise their underlying expectations, assumptions, or perspectives" (p. 29). According to Cranton, this type of learning empowers learners, and group work is critical to this process, "When the goal of a group is emancipatory learning, transformative group learning best describes the process" (p. 30).

Dirkx (1998) stated that structured group activities are a key component of collaborative learning strategies. Cohort learning must be facilitated, however (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). In their research, Scribner and Donaldson (2001) found that multiple forms of learning took place within a cohort, including transformative learning and "…the study showed how the dynamics of a cohort must be attended to in order to ensure that learning experiences for all cohorts are maximized" (p. 628). In the instance of transformative learning, instructors will be required to incorporate forethought and reflection in relation to "design and management of groups and assignments so that reflection, critical reflection, and transformative learning will occur" (p. 631).

Conceptual Framework

Change is often more successfully processed within groups rather than on an individual basis (Franz, 2005). Group interaction is a key tenet of transformative learning (Cranton, 2002; Merriam, 2008; Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1981) referred to the emancipatory learning domain when describing the concept of self-reflection. One method for promoting emancipatory education and transformative learning is to facilitate a learning experience that contains discourse, critical reflection, and ultimately, transformative learning (Mezirow 2003). Transformative learning reformulates the criteria for valuing and taking action (Mezirow, 1978) and "transformative learning develops autonomous thinking...[it is] the process of effecting change in a *frame of reference*" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5, italics in original). One aspect of this study revealed whether critical thinking also facilitates transformative learning. Transformative learning is considered a unique adult theory of learning with communication as a key component (E.W. Taylor, 2007). There has been an increase in the research on transformative learning with an emphasis on the role of personal relationships in the transformative learning process (Taylor & Snyder, 2011).

Mezirow's transformation theory incorporates Freire's (1970) concept of "conscientization" and learning for liberation, as well as Habermas's (1987) ideas of communicative action and each of these frameworks strives to promote and enhance emancipatory education. E.W. Taylor (2007) linked the concept of transformative learning to epistemological change while Kegan (2000) stated that,

> at the heart of a form is a way of knowing; thus genuinely transformational learning is always to some extent an epistemological change rather than merely a change in behavioral repertoire or an increase in the quantity or fund of knowledge. (p. 48)

In a study on fostering citizen action toward a sustainable society, Lange (2004) reported the change that results from transformation is both an epistemological and ontological process, which impacts how people relate to the world and those around them.

The approach to learning presented by Kegan (2000) and Lange (2004) supports the idea that meaning is made individually through interactions with other individuals. Habermas's (2004) writings focus on the process and criticality of social discourse, and that interaction and discussion are key components for promoting democracy and giving voice to individuals. This interaction is found in communicative learning through communicative discourse (Mezirow, 2009).

Childhood education centers on the concept of pedagogy in which information is transferred from the teacher to the student (Knowles, 1980). The teacher determines what is to be taught, when it is taught, and the teaching method (Knowles, 1980). In the context of adult education, instrumental learning offers a similar construct with its focus on controlling and manipulating the environment and its "emphasis on improving prediction and performance" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Instrumental learning is considered task-oriented problem solving (Mezirow, 1990). With large numbers of adults returning to school to increase their skills in light of growing economic changes and demands (Chao et al., 2007; Destiny Solutions, 2012), instrumental learning is an expeditious method for meeting this demand since adults learn best "…in an interactive format with heavy emphasis on the practical application of their learning" (Tweedell, 2000, p. 1). The implication for degree completion programs is that the opportunity for communicative learning, discourse and critical reflection are diminished if the curriculum is instrumental.

For transformative learning to occur, critical reflection must take place (Mezirow, 1990). "Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). One way to promote critical reflection is to have a skilled facilitator ask questions and challenge beliefs in a safe environment (Mezirow, 1990). "Our greatest assurance of objectivity comes from exposing an expressed idea to rational and reflective discourse" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 4). Snyder (2008) affirmed the importance of reflective discourse and includes the idea of context as an important part of the learning equation. "Three requirements exist for this process of transformative learning to occur: first, the context must be appropriate for transformative learning; second, the learner must engage in self-reflection; and third, the learner must engage in critical discourse" (Snyder, 2008, p. 165). Kegan (2000) supported this developmental concept by arguing that learning must inform and transform and must lead to a change in individual epistemology.

> Epistemology refers to precisely this: not what we know but our way of knowing. Attending to the epistemological inevitably involves attending to two kinds of processes, both at the heart of a concept like transformational learning. The first is what we might call meaning making…The second is what we might call reforming our meaning-making. (Kegan, 2000, p. 52)

Extending the concept of meaning making further to embrace Habermas's (2004) theory, then public discourse and its role in promoting democracy may be included (Brookfield, 2005). Habermas (2004) argued it is this face-to-face interaction that enables people to discuss ideas and reach conclusions that benefit the greatest number of people. Habermas (2004) referred to this as interaction within the public sphere.

In adult-oriented higher education programs that utilize an instrumental learning approach, reflection is incorporated mainly to assess the effectiveness of derived solutions to the task; therefore, this reflection focuses on logic and empirical evidence with an objective of improving performance (Mezirow, 1990). Communicative learning strives to understand the meaning of what is learned and shared among participants in order to achieve coherence and enlarge individual perspective (Mezirow, 1990) and to "…arrive at the best judgement, not to assess a truth claim" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 91).

There is market-driven and economic pressure to meet consumer demands in a changing work environment (Kazis et al., 2007; Kerka, 1996), yet how students create meaning impacts whether change is occurring (Mezirow, 1990, 1997). "Individuals in the final stage of reflective judgment can offer a perspective about their own perspective, an essential condition for transformative learning" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 61). The use of cohorts may provide the conditions necessary to support transformative learning (Barlas, 2001; Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). According to Taylor and Snyder (2011), "It seems that social acceptance, acknowledgement, and possibly appreciation by others' peers is important to the transformative process" (p. 318). In addition, students may discuss course ideas with individuals outside of the class (people with whom they regularly interact) to help create meaning (Snyder, 2008). They may consider previous learning experiences and compare those to their most current coursework, and evaluate what they have learned in the context of their work experience and larger world-view (Snyder, 2008). Mezirow (1990) pointed out the importance of reflection: "Perhaps even more central to adult learning than elaborating established meaning schemes is the process of reflecting back on prior learning to determine whether what we have learned is justified under present circumstances" (p. 2). The concept of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000) is affirmed

through research and "through its stability over time, its relationship to expanding the self and pursuit of autonomy, and the applicability for informing classroom practice" (E.W. Taylor, 2007, p. 185).

Problem Statement

To respond to the growing demand for adult, degree completion programs, higher education institutions are providing programs in greater numbers designed to meet consumer demand (Eduventures, 2012). This rapid growth limits the ability of educational institutions to meet social and cultural learning objectives and reduces or eliminates group work (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005). To meet the demand for adult education, higher education programs utilize an instrumental learning method with its focus on task-oriented behavior (Hermanson, 1996). This is in contrast to communicative learning with its focus on understanding meaning and expanding individual perspective (Mezirow, 1990). Furthermore, this rapid growth in college-level adult education programs with an emphasis on instrumental learning also forfeits meeting the adults' interest in personal growth (Hermanson, 1996). The problem examined in this research study was whether adults experienced transformative learning with the ADCP model.

The transformative learning process intends to help students formulate new frames of reference that "...are likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action than other frames of reference" (Marsick & Mezirow, 2002, p. 1). Communicative learning is a critical step in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). In a time when gathering in a public place and participating in democratic discussion is diminishing, the classroom is becoming the forum through which adults may gather to learn new concepts, discuss ideas, and formulate new theories for societal functioning (Wallis, 2003).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to understand whether adult students participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs experienced transformative learning. An outcome of this study was to provide student feedback to the developers and administrators of adult degree completion programs to inform potential improvements in relation to the facilitation of transformative learning.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

RQ1. Do adults participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs at faith-based institutions experience transformative learning as outlined by the Learning Activities Survey (King, 2009)?

RQ2. Does participation in learning activities predict the incidence of transformative learning?

RQ3. Does the incidence of transformative learning vary based on age?

RQ4. Does the incidence of transformative learning vary based on gender?

RQ5. Does the incidence of transformative learning vary based on length of time in the degree program?

Rationale for Examining Transformative Learning

Studies by Drago-Severson et al. (2001) and Lawrence (1997) examined cohort dynamics, the interaction among participants and collaborative learning, and how the cohorts assist in establishing an environment for examining perspectives. Scribner and Donaldson (2001) studied the learning experiences of a cohort and, while not a focus of their study, found that students expressed they had experienced a transformation of their beliefs. However, these

studies do not explain cohort learning's direct effect on transformative learning, especially within the audience of adults returning to school to complete a degree. It is important to understand the experience of these students (in relationship to transformative learning) given the proliferation of programs, the growing number of adults returning to school, the motivating factors of career and economics, and the premise that adult education is rooted in the concept of developing the whole person. Taylor and Snyder (2011) updated a review of the research on transformative learning theory and found one aspect of growing significance is "the role of relationship in the process of a transformation" (p. 317).

One study (Tisdell, et al., 2002).) sought to, "…examine the nature of the cohort learning experience" in a graduate, online program (Tisdell et al., 2002). The findings of Tisdell et al. included the ongoing negotiation of process and the ongoing construction of knowledge both of individuals and the group as a whole. These points provide insight into the adult cohort experience but do not incorporate transformative learning.

Fetherston and Kelly (2007) wanted to understand whether there was a relationship between content that promoted transformation and a particular teaching style in a traditional classroom setting. The researchers sought to discover whether a change in teaching methodology encouraged transformation; the study examined the link between content and teaching methodology. Benson, Guy, and Tallman (2001) conducted research that examined the learning perspectives of traditional graduate students engaged in online courses. A primary purpose of this study was to "explore the theory of transformative learning as a possible explanation for any changes that [occurred] in those perspectives" (Benson et al., 2001, p. 254). In this case, the instructors did not intentionally attempt to facilitate transformation, but rather, wished to uncover whether transformation occurred and whether this change could be attributed

to the theory of transformative learning. Benson, Guy, and Tallman (2001) recommend future research on this concept with the thought that "such research would provide insight for educators seeking to create transformative learning environments online" (p. 268).

Kasworm (2003b) examined the characteristics and motivation of adult students. She defined the "concept of the adult student as one who represents the *status of age; …the status of maturity and developmental complexity;…and the status of responsible and often-competing sets of adult roles*" (p. 3, italics in original). King (2002) looked at educators, technology, and the potential for transformation.

Prior to this, King's (1996) research resulted in the development of the Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997, 2009) (see Appendix A for sample survey). "Rooted in adult learning theory, this research sought to develop a model of inquiry regarding the factors that facilitate transformative learning in a higher education context" (King, 1996, p. 2). Other studies include Brock (2007) who conducted research with undergraduate business majors for transformational learning experiences; Glisczinski's (2005) examination of transformative teacher education; and Wansick's (2007) research of transformative learning in online courses. A common theme among these studies is the impact of either instructor preparedness in facilitating transformative learning or the course activities' ability to create an environment that might promote transformative learning (Brock, 2007; Glisczinski, 2005; Wansick, 2007). King (1996) recommended that, "additional research queries should be conducted into the transformational learning process in adult and higher education" (p. 5). Finally, E.W. Taylor (1998) recommended further exploration into the practice of transformative learning and the limits to promoting ideal practice found in Mezirow's early work.

The development of the Learning Activities Survey (LAS) stimulated an expansion of transformative learning research (King, 1997, 2009). This expansion has led to a scaffolding of ideas concerning the theory, an increase in dialog concerning transformative learning, and opened the door to additional studies (King, 2009). "This widespread interest and continuing visibility [in transformative learning] has created a rich climate for building new ideas upon prior ones, engaging in critical, urgent, and meaningful dialogue, and pursuing scores of research studies" (King, 2009, p. xxii). The LAS and the supporting documentation are intended to provide "…a flexible and yet comprehensive approach to studying transformative learning" (p. xxxi).

Role of Researcher

In quantitative research, the researcher first determines what to study; forms specific questions designed to focus only the topic under research; and collects quantifiable data (Creswell, 2008). Ethical considerations should be made and ethical standards maintained throughout the research process (Creswell, 2008; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Ethical considerations may include respect for the individual, respect for the sites utilized in the research (including following all approval requirements), and protecting participant anonymity (Creswell, 2008). Researchers conducting quantitative research remain the background of the study, relying on survey instruments to collect data (Creswell, 2008). Prior to conducting this study, the researcher taught in a degree completion program for adult students similar to those under study.

Significance

Evidence of the ten phases of Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory among adult students predicts its occurrence (Brock, Florescu, & Teran, 2011). Brock et al (2011) also pointed out that, "…little quantitative study has been made of the incidence of transformative

learning" (p. 59). This study explored whether transformative learning occurred among adult students in cohort-based, degree completion programs. For students who reported experiencing transformative learning, the influence of learning activities was reported, including critical thinking activities, on the experience of transformative learning. The Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997, 2009) was used to determine, via quantitative methods, the effectiveness of particular learning activities in fostering transformative learning.

Definition of Terms

Accelerated Degree Program: "By definition, accelerated learning programs are structured for students to take less time than conventional (often referred to as traditional) programs to attain university credits, certificates, or degrees. The core element in accelerated learning programs is the accelerated course. Ground-based (as opposed to on-line) accelerated courses are presented in less time than the conventional number of instructional contact hours (for example, twenty hours of class time versus forty-five hours) and for a shorter duration (for example, five weeks rather than sixteen weeks)" (Wlodkowski, 2003, p. 6).

Adult education: "Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9).

Adult student: "…the adult student is one who represents the status *of age* (typically defined as twenty-five years of age or older); the *status of maturity and developmental complexity* acquired through life responsibilities, perspectives, and financial independence; and *status of responsible and often-competing sets of adult roles* reflecting work, family, community, and college students' commitments (Kasworm, 2003b, p. 3, italics in original).

Adult Learner: Adults engaged in learning activities "which lead to changes in thinking, values, or behaviors" (Cranton, 1992, p. 3).

Assimilative learning: The type of learning that takes place when students simply acquire new information that can easily fit into their pre-existing knowledge structures (McGonigal, 2005).

Cohort: "…groups of students who enroll at the same time and go through a program by taking the same courses at the same time…" (Imel, 2002, p 1).

Communicative action: The inter-action of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations (Habermas, 1984).

Communicative learning: "… *understanding the meaning* of what others communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labor, autonomy, commitment, and democracy" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 8, italics in original).

Critical discourse: Dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values (Mezirow, 2003).

Critical reflection: A critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built (Mezirow, 1990).

Critical thinking: Reasonable reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do (Ennis, 1993).

Degree completion program: "…an educational program that is designed especially to meet the needs of the working adult who, having acquired sixty or more college credit hours during previous enrollments, is returning to school after an extended period of absence to obtain a baccalaureate degree" (J. Taylor, 2000, p. 2).

Emancipatory learning domain: "…involves an interest in self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of self-reflection, including interest in the way one's history and biography has expressed itself in the way one sees oneself, one's roles and social expectations" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 5).

Instrumental learning: "…task-oriented problem solving…" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 7)

Technical learning domain: "refers broadly to the ways one controls and manipulates his or her environment" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 4).

Transformative learning: "Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 58-59).

Trigger event: "…an externally imposed disorienting dilemma – a divorce, death of a loved one, change in job status, retirement, or other…become catalysts or 'trigger events' that precipitate critical reflection and transformations" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 5).

Summary

This chapter described the demand for adult higher education and how this demand was expected to grow for several more years. An introduction to the work of Mezirow and transformative learning was also presented. The review of transformative learning included a review of Habermas's instrumental and communicative learning domains, specifically, how Mezirow utilized the concept of communicative learning in building transformative learning theory.

The chapter also discussed the development of the adult degree completion program (ADCP) and the adoption of the ADCP by schools as a tool to accommodate the growing

population of adult students seeking a college degree. The purpose of adult education was addressed as well as criticism of degree completion programs, including the conflict between the historical purpose of adult education and the current emphasis on the economic benefits of adult education. A description of the growth in the use of a cohort model of program delivery was provided as well as the connection between transformative learning and cohort utilization.

CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This research study examined whether adults enrolled in cohort-based, degree completion education programs at faith-based colleges and universities experienced transformative learning. This chapter presented literature concerning the characteristics of adult students and their participation in cohort-based college programs. Literature on transformative learning and the influence of Habermas was reviewed. In addition, literature discussing the purpose of adult education; why adults return to school; and the cohort model of instruction and adult degree completion programs, was examined. This included the concept of reflection and discourse and transformative learning in the classroom.

Transformative Learning

Mezirow (1978) introduced the theory of transformative learning after researching the return of adult women to college. Out of this research, Mezirow (1978) identified a new type of learning referred to as "learning about meaning perspectives" (p. 101). "A meaning perspective refers to the structure of cultural assumptions that have influenced the way we see ourselves and our relationships and the way we pattern our lives" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 101) and can influence the way new experiences are assimilated into our lives with the potential of leading to a transformative experience.

Meaning perspectives are revealed through awareness of current circumstances and through self-examination of assumptions and expectations concerning roles (Mezirow, 1978). Mezirow's theory took root after he become aware of and examined college re-entry programs for women designed to facilitate this examination of assumptions and expectations.

Transformative learning incorporates features of conscientization (Freire, 1970) and the domains of instrumental learning and communicative learning (Habermas, 1984). In the work of

Freire, Mezirow saw how a deeper examination of assumptions and expectations is part of problem solving. Through education and dialogue, problem solving may lead to deeper awareness of the issues and "to identify incongruities and contradictions inherent in [the] situation" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 103). As understanding grows, those involved in the examination become more critically aware of the circumstances in question and the reasoning used to form their beliefs. "'Conscientization' is the name Freire gave this movement to a new level of awareness" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 103). This effort leads to a moment when currently held beliefs are no longer effective in dealing with similar circumstances in new contexts. "When a meaning perspective can no longer comfortably deal with anomalies in a new situation, a transformation can occur" (Mezirow, 1978, p. 104).

Mezirow (1978) found that "even after restructuring one's reality and seeing the need for action, the will or determination to persevere in carrying out one's plans may require special support and assistance" (p. 105). Association with others who share the new perspective may be necessary to sustain the action required by this new perspective (Mezirow, 1978).

In 1981 Mezirow discussed transformative learning as a "critical theory of adult learning and education" (p. 3). "Transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference – sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) – to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 58-59). Transformative learning is a process through which adults may gain greater understanding of their experiences and beliefs. E.W. Taylor (2008) indicated that an objective of this process is for adults to develop more reliable beliefs. This is accomplished through a re-examination of current beliefs as a result of some experience and then

forming new beliefs in light of new information discovered through this experience (E.W. Taylor, 2008).

Over time, Mezirow's theory evolved into a process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009). This process gave way to the characteristics of meaning in transformation as a result of Mezirow's study of women returning to college. These characteristics are:

- Experiencing a disorienting dilemma;
- Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame;
- A critical assessment of assumptions;
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions;
- Planning a course of action;
- Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
- Provisional trying of new roles;
- Building competence, and self-confidence in new roes and relationships;
- a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2009, p. 94)

Transformative learning is a growing theory in adult education (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). In an article discussing issues with transformative learning theory, Taylor and Cranton (2013) found 119 articles and over 1300 references to transformative learning in a document search and found that references to transformative learning over a fifteen-year period had doubled every five years. The projects identified in the review by Taylor and Cranton (2013) shared an objective of trying to understand, in greater detail, one or more of the phases of transformative learning.

Mezirow (2009) incorporated Habermas's (1984) concepts of instrumental and communicative learning into transformative learning, and argued that communicative learning is foundational to transformative learning. Mezirow (1990) stated that instrumental learning involves reflection for problem solving; communicative learning is associated with reflection on premises and "involves a critical review of distorted presuppositions" (p. 18) and is a critical step in transformative learning. In Mezirow's (1990) words: "Reflection on one's own premises can lead to transformative learning" (p. 18). Mezirow (2003) explained transformative learning as epistemology and the importance of critical reflection, "Critical to this process is critical reflection on assumptions and critical dialectical discourse" (p. 1). Mezirow (2003) also discussed the importance of interaction to the transformative learning experience:

> Communicative learning involves understanding what others mean when they communicate with us. *Discourse* is that type of dialogue in which we participate with others whom we believe to be informed, objective and rational to assess reasons that justify problematic beliefs. (p. 2, italics in original)

One goal of adult education includes assisting adult students to think autonomously while also achieving their individual learning objectives (Mezirow, 2003). This goal is achieved first by exposing the student to emancipatory education (Mezirow, 1990). "Emancipatory education is an organized effort to help the learner challenge presuppositions, explore alternative perspectives, transform old ways of understanding, and act on new perspectives" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 18). Emancipatory education, according to Mezirow, precedes transformative learning and is important to its occurrence. As Imel (1998) pointed out, emancipatory learning is intended to free the learner from "forces and control over their lives" (p. 3) that limit their perspective and ability to effect change. Emancipatory education is also a collective educational

activity (Inglis, 1997). Cranton (2002) stated that emancipatory education occurs both as a result of self-reflection and group interaction, "Modeling critical self-reflection and setting up an environment in which critical self-reflection as a group norm may be one of the most important ways to teach for transformation" (Cranton, 2002, p. 68). E.W. Taylor (2008) illustrates the link between one goal of adult education and transformative learning. Transformative learning involves an epistemological change, a new way of making meaning, which includes a challenge to personal beliefs and the construction of new interpretations of experience and meaning (E.W> Taylor, 2008). E.W. Taylor (2008) commented on the growing importance of critical reflection and the need to understand more about the practice of transformative learning in the classroom, and argues that there is still a great deal to be learned, including the student's role in cultivating transformative learning.

Mezirow (1981) discussed Habermas's influence on critical theory, especially as it relates to transformative learning. Mezirow (1981) noted the three primary cognitive interests suggested by Habermas as the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. The technical area relates to instrumental learning; the practical area relates to communicative action and is an important part of the overall transformative process; and the emancipatory is of particular interest in how it relates to the premise of this study (Mezirow, 1981). Emancipatory action is the intent of education as it provides an understanding of the learner's historical situation (Mezirow, 1981). He offers an explanation of transformative learning that speaks to this emancipatory or citizenry aspect of adult education.

> [It] is the emancipatory process *of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive*

discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1981, p. 6, italics in original)

It is within this work that Mezirow (1981) argued that transformative learning is a uniquely adult learning domain and, for adult learning to be effective, it must address needs of adults in relation to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981). Mezirow's (1981) presentation of group learning is the link to employing cohorts to facilitate the transformative learning process. "Emphasis is given equality and reciprocity in building a support group through which learners can share experiences with a common problem and come to share a new perspective" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 19).

Reflection and Discourse

Mezirow (2003) described the epistemology of transformative learning and states that critical reflection and critical-dialectical discourse are essential to the process of transformative learning. As students seek to understand what is being communicated (communicative learning) as opposed to learning to perform (instrumental learning), reflection is the act that enables the learner to "…correct distortions in [his] beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). Reflecting on a belief in light of new information guides the learner when those beliefs no longer fit within a new context (Cranton & King, 2003). When this reflection occurs within a group setting, the perspective of others can assist in reconsidering long-held beliefs (Cranton & King, 2003).

Transformation often occurs as the result of a significant event, also known as a disorienting dilemma (Mezirow, 1997). The event causes a reframing of one's beliefs through a three-step process: critical reflection on one's assumptions, discourse to validate the critically

reflective insight, and action (Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow (1997) points out that "learning is fundamentally social" (p. 61) and requires discourse with others to validate new insights.

Review of Transformative Learning Research

Cheney (2010) conducted a literature review covering a ten-year period that sought to uncover how transformative learning has been operationalized and measured. Over that time span, Cheney (2010) found 51 studies that included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods to measure and describe transformative learning, with the vast majority utilizing qualitative research. In fact, Cheney found out of the 51 studies reviewed, only seven utilized a quantitative methodology. These results are reflective of earlier work by E. W. Taylor (2000) who found that few studies measuring the occurrence of transformative learning had been conducted with a recommendation for further quantitative research.

A search was conducted to identify research on transformative learning within adult education settings and the following studies were identified:

Brown's (2005) research sought to learn more about the power of transformative learning to prepare educational leaders to be more reflective and purpose-driven in educational administration and found that critical reflection was a key component of the transformative learning experience. Brown's (2005) survey focused on educational leaders with a stated commitment to social justice and equity.

Imel (1998) supported the goal of the educational setting as being a place where "we must learn to make our own interpretations rather than act on the purposes, beliefs, judgments, and feelings of others" (p. 1). Imel's (1998) report emphasized that another goal of education is for students to form individual interpretations and move away from the beliefs and judgments of others.

Malone, Jones, and Stallings (2002) reported that teacher education can be a transformative experience. The teachers surveyed in their study also indicated that transforming students' perspectives is a hoped-for outcome of learning. Malone et al. (2002) looked specifically at service-learning impacts in teacher education. They "hypothesized that a service-learning tutoring experience was one means of fostering transformative learning in teacher education students" (Malone, et al., 2002, p. 62), and through the research and model analysis the conclusion was that students did experience transformation. One area of significant change involved the learners' relationship to the community and civic engagement (Malone et al., 2002). Mälkki (2010) examined the emotional dimension of transformative learning, complementing Mezirow's (1991, 2000) work concerning the circumstances that precede reflection and the challenges to engaging in the reflective process.

In keeping with the two learning domains of instrumental and communicative learning (Habermas, 1984), Glisczinski (2008) sought to discover

> … the relationship between what higher education commonly does a great deal of—that is schooling students with information, and what great higher education shares in common—that is a commitment to transforming students as educated thinkers and decision makers who understand and use information toward an ecology of instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory ends as citizens… (p. 2)

Glisczinski's (2008) research provided new information to help understand the relationship between instrumental and communicative learning and speaks to the purpose of adult education; to not only inform but to transform.

Kitchenham (2008) offered an updated view of Mezirow's transformational learning theory. Kitchenham (2008) created a diagram that differentiates between instrumental and

communicative learning. The learning types are differentiated as instrumental – what is to be learned and the best way for learning it; dialogic – ask questions about methods and context; and self-reflective – asking "why;" becoming more aware of self-beliefs and the beliefs of others. Brown (2005) also researched transformative learning in adult education. The purpose of Brown's study was "to explore the effects of an alternative, transformative andragogy" (p. 17), incorporating three aspects of Mezirow's (1990) transformative learning theory. These included centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. Brown's (2005) results supported the notion of transformative learning processes are valid and useful tools when working with adult students:

> As shown here, transformative learning is a process of experiential learning, critical self-reflection, and rational discourse that can be stimulated by people, events, or changes in context which challenge the learner's basic assumption of the world. (p. 23)

In an update of transformative learning research, E.W. Taylor (2007) found, "The present research continues to affirm Mezirow's conception of transformative learning, through its stability over time, its relationship to expanding the self and pursuit of autonomy, and the applicability for informing classroom practice" (Taylor, E.W., 2007, p. 185). With the creation of the Learning Activities Survey (LAS) (King, 2009), research into transformative learning has expanded. The LAS and the supporting documentation are intended to provide flexibility in approach to the study of transformative learning and to provide a means to measure the occurrence of transformative learning.

Transformative Learning in the Classroom

King's (1997) first study using the LAS was of adult undergraduate students and utilized a convenience sample. The instrument was distributed to 737 students and 422 completed

surveys. King (1997) followed a constructivist approach and relied on student self-reporting. In researching the literature concerning learning activities, King (2009) devised two major categories; classroom assignments and support. King (2009) further refined classroom assignments into five learning activities. The learning activities are critical thinking assignments, class discussions, student self-evaluation, discovery of one's voice, and miscellaneous learning activities. King's (1997) literature review showed that as methods for bringing transformative learning into practice were examined, "…their focus has been on developing curricula that will promote transformative learning" (p. 24). King (1997) attributes each learning activity category to particular theorists:

- Critical thinking assignments – Cranton (1994) and Brookfield (1995)
- Class discussions – Knowles (1980) and Brookfield (1986)
- Student self-evaluation – Kusnic and Finley, (1993) and Taylor and Marienau (1995)
- Discovery of one's voice – Cranton (1994)
- Support – Brookfield (1986), Mezirow (1991), and Cranton (1994)

King's (1997) doctoral dissertation utilized the LAS with transformative learning as its framework and sought to understand whether transformative learning was occurring among adult students in higher education. A ProQuest database search limited to the last eight years returned 20 dissertations covering transformative learning and utilizing the LAS, with publication dates ranging from 2009 to 2017. King (2015) updated the number of studies utilizing the LAS by indicating that since 1997 King has conducted 17 studies and more than 50 studies were conducted by other scholars. Table 2.1 contains a list of dissertations that utilized the LAS in educational settings. Given that transformative learning is considered a theory of adult learning

(E.W. Taylor, 2007), it is important to note that the studies cited by involved adult students in higher education settings.

Table 2.1 Selected Dissertations

Selected dissertations utilizing the Learning Activities Survey in Educational Settings		
Author	**Date**	**Topic**
Arslanian	2011	Identification of factors within transformational learning among organizational psychology students
Brock	2007	Undergraduate business school education and to determine if there is a difference between male and fem ale students' experiences
Caruana	2011	Preservice teachers' perceptions of their transformative learnings: A case study
Ellis	2012	Transformational learning and first-generation nontraditional learners
Kitchenham	2005	Teachers and technology: A transformative journey
Kumi Yehoah	2012	Factors that promote transformative learning experiences of international graduate-level learners
LaCava	2002	Transformative learning in adult ESL learners using Internet technology
Schwartz	2013	Examination of factors that promote transformative learning experiences of college-level adult students of foreign languages
Wasnick	2007	Transformative learning in online courses

Snyder (2008) conducted a literature review examining ten empirical qualitative research articles "…to better understand how researchers use…transformative learning theory as a functional tool for measuring the transformative process" (p. 159). Snyder (2008) found that Mezirow's (1978; 1991; 2000) ten phases of transformative learning were a functional framework for measuring transformation. Synder's review included two studies that utilized the LAS (King, 2004; Kitchenham, 2008). Snyder (2008) made several recommendations to future study designs including the use of specific learning contexts. The research for this dissertation intends to use the context of adult, degree completion programs utilizing a cohort model of delivery.

The outcomes of these studies (Table 2.1) support the use of the LAS (King, 2009) as a tool to measure the occurrence of transformative learning. Caruana, Woodrow, and Perez (2015) conducted a study to "…examine transformative learning experiences in two graduate teacher preparation courses" (p. 25). They concluded the LAS is able to detect, and to what extent, transformative learning occurs. Ellis (2012) used the LAS to determine the occurrence of transformational learning of first-generation non-traditional students, and concluded that the students experienced transformative learning. Duncan Grand (2011) sought to understand whether teachers' beliefs the teaching of diverse students can be affected by experiencing transformative learning. Grand (2011) found that, "transformative learning holds promise for affecting these types of changes in teacher attitudes" (p. 7).

Wansick (2007) studied transformative learning in online courses in order to understand whether there was a conflict in the usefulness of online learning versus the actual learning experiences of the learners. Wansick's literature review indicated evidence that transformative learning can be a meaningful learning opportunity for the students, and found 38.5% of participants demonstrated evidence of transformative learning. Wansick also found there was a statistically significant association between the number of semesters student had been enrolled in their program and the occurrence of transformative learning. This finding supports one of the population requirements for this research study that students must have earned some college credit as an admission requirement.

Schwartz (2013) examined college-level adult students studying foreign languages. Schwartz (2013) contends that, "Learning a foreign language can be the first step into the transformative learning endeavor for domestic students who pursue opportunities and possibilities in education in order to improve their personal and professional lives" (p. 9).

Schwartz, in this same study, discovered educators and other administrators do not have sufficient information about the factors that promote transformative learning, especially in regard to "…the learning activities in class, personal life events, and the learner's demographic characteristics" (p. 9), all components of the LAS. While Schwartz's (2013) results indicated only 15.3% of students reported experiencing transformative learning (somewhat in keeping with the problem statement), Schwartz found statistically significant relationships among self-reflection and mentoring activities for those reporting a transformative learning experience.

Caruana's (2011) research sought to discover, "…whether teacher candidates perceive that the learning experiences designed for them during teacher preparation help develop dispositions" (p. 4) toward certain, desirable, teaching characteristics. Caruana (2011) argued that the teacher learning experiences that promoted transformative learning contributes to their professional dispositions. Caruana (2011) found only 25% of those surveyed indicated experiencing transformative learning. However, those students indicated that among the various learning activities, it was the class-wide activities, group activities, and personal learning activities that had the greatest impact.

The purpose of a study by Kumi-Yeboah (2012), "…was to examine factors that promote transformative learning experiences of international graduate-level learners" (p. 6). While there was less emphasis on specific learning activities, the results are favorable for further study. Specifically, 79.6% of the participants reported experiencing transformative learning. Among these students, 32.3% indicated the experience was related to education; 29.4% indicated it was both education and non-education; and 17.9% indicated a transformational learning experience related to non-educational factors. The results support the notion that respondents to this research study who experience a transformative learning apart from their educational experience

(group one) may be included with the number of respondents who report experiencing transformative learning as a part of their educational experiences (group two). These two groups combined will reveal which learning activities had an impact. Kumi-Yeboah (2012) reported major themes surfaced related to mentoring and classroom discussions, as well as assigned readings, and concluded there is a relationship between participation in classroom activities and transformative learning.

These studies reflect the use of the Learning Activities Survey (King, 1998, 2007) in educational settings for the purpose of assessing whether students experience transformative learning. They provide a basis for continuing research of the occurrence of transformative learning in adult education cohorts.

Influence of Habermas

Mezirow (2009) wrote that the work of Habermas (1984) influenced the development of transformative learning. Specifically, Mezirow (2009) referred to the concepts of instrumental and communicative learning. In an earlier study Mezirow (1990) stated that instrumental learning pertains to task-oriented problem solving, may be validated through empirical testing (Mezirow, 2009) and involves a level of reflection. "Reflection is significantly involved when we look back on content or procedural assumptions guiding the problem-solving process to reassess the efficacy of the strategies and tactics used" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 7).

Communicative Action and Discourse

Habermas (1984) described communicative action as "…the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relationships" (p. 86). Communicative learning is designed to understand someone's meaning (Mezirow, 2009). Its

purpose "is to arrive at the best judgment, not to assess truth claim, as in instrumental learning" (p. 91).

Discourse is critical to transformative learning and, according to Mezirow's (2003) theory, involves dialogue that assesses "beliefs, feelings, and values" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59). Discourse begins from the point of view of the students' frame of reference and it is through dialogue and discourse that frames of reference may be expanded to be more inclusive (Mezirow, 2003), and is associated with Habermas (2004) theory of communicative action. Fleming (2002) discussed the impact Habermas has on Mezirow's theory of transformative learning by emphasizing the social dimension of transformative learning and defines the public sphere as:

> The public sphere is located in civil society and is where people can discuss matters of mutual concerns as peers, and learn about facts, events; and the options, interests, and perspective of others in an atmosphere free of coercion and of inequalities that would incline individuals to acquiesce or be silent. (p. 3)

Education can fulfill this purpose, especially in light of the loss of other forums (Crick & Joldersma, 2007). Habermas (1987) introduced the concept of the lifeworld as the place where communicative action takes place.

> The lifeworld is…the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. (Habermas, 1987, p. 126)

When economic and political forces colonize the lifeworld there is a loss of communication and consensus building among the citizenry, leading to a reduction in communicative action (Crick &

Joldersma, 2007). As these complex systems of society invade the lifeworld, they disrupt discourse and meaning making (Fleming, 2002). Fleming also argued the classroom, where collaborative inquiry occurs may, indeed, become the public sphere.

The Public Sphere

Habermas (2004) reiterated his original premise and purpose behind the public sphere. The public sphere is where public discourse occurs, whether in relation to politics, literature, or other scholarly debates. Habermas described the public sphere as a setting where dissent can be clarified and agreement may be reached. Habermas (2004) identified the strength of the public sphere and the need for discourse by stating that people learn from one another within an environment that is culturally relevant and stimulating.

A step in the learning process is brought to light as Habermas (2004) builds the concept of the public sphere. "In communicative action we proceed, as it were, naively, while in discourse, we exchange reasons in order to assess validity claims that become problematic. Rational discourse borrows this reflexivity from the written word" (Habermas, 2004, p. 5). Brookfield (2005) provided detailed insight into the work of Habermas (1987) as it relates to adult education and wrote that Habermas's work supports adult education's mission to develop critical reasoning within learners. This facet of Habermas's work is an important aspect of enhancing democratic involvement. Brookfield (2005) created a link from Habermas's (1987) concept of communicative action and discourse to Mezirow's (1981) reinterpretation as of Habermas's work as emancipatory action being a primary step in transformative learning.

Brookfield (2005) described how the public sphere is diminishing. However, there is an opportunity for adult education to fill this gap. "Haberrnas has as one of his central projects the understanding and creation of the conditions for democracy. Adult learning has a critical role in

this effort, since Habermas's goal for regenerating democracy resides in adults' capacity to learn (Brookfield, 2005, p. 1147). Parker (2010) stated schools established within democratic societies have an obligation to develop engaged citizens. The conclusions from Parker's (2010) research focused on to the role of discourse.

> Seminar and deliberation are public discourse structures suitable to the cultivation, in schools, of political friendship among 'acquaintances' and 'strangers' who have little in common saved shared problems…Diversity and problems are essential assets for such and education. Without them, there's too little conflict and no widening of relationships around things that matter. (p. 11)

Critical discourse plays a vital role in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003). Through dialogue and critical reflection, individuals may work together to reformulate frames of reference (Mezirow, 1990, 2000). This adjustment to frames of reference enables individuals with disparate "habits of mind" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6) to reach agreement on issues that concern all involved. "Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6). Habits of mind are expressed through a specific point of view and yet are more ingrained than a point of view. As transformative learners utilize critical reflection to move toward a revised point of view, habits of mind may also be transformed.

Adult Students in Higher Education

A report by the Lumina Foundation (2012) concerning adult college completion established a goal of having 60% of the adult population with either a degree or some type of certification by 2025. It was reported that 22% of adults have some college credit but no degree (U.S. Census, 2017) and an analysis by the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

(2012) reports that approximately 12 – 14 million adults within that 22% have earned at least 60 college credit hours. By 2015, the number of adults that had enrolled in college but not completed a degree was between 30 and 35 million (Erisman & Steele, 2015). Snyder and Dillow (2013) report that adult college enrollment is predicted to grow to over 9 million by 2024 (Figure 2.1).

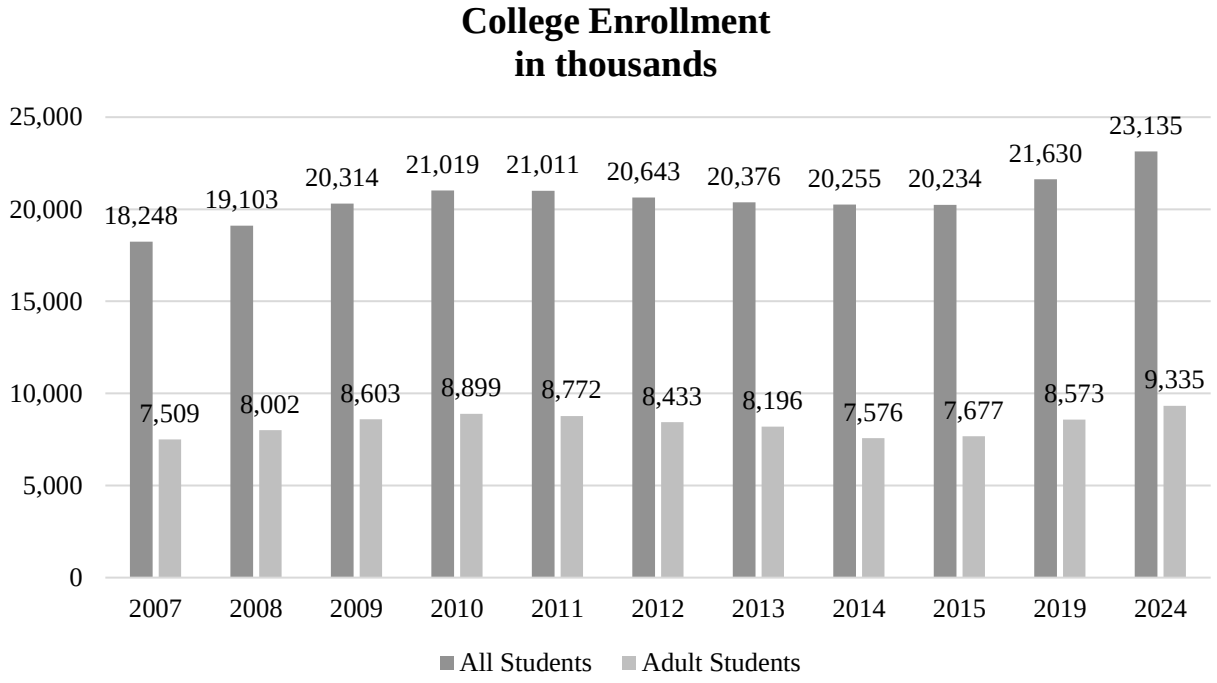


Figure 2-1 College Enrollment Data

The National Student Clearinghouse (2012) describes an adult student as someone aged 25 or older. Contrasting the National Student Clearinghouse report, in an earlier study, Aslanian (2007) found that the adult student population is getting older, as "more and more students are in their late 30's and early 40's" (p. 4). In addition:

- Adults are taking undergraduate credit courses;

- an increasing number of adult students return to school having already earned some college credit; and
- the adult student is typically working and financing his/her education directly or through tuition reimbursement. (Aslanian, 2007, pp. 4-5)

Adult students may also be considered nontraditional (Wirt et al., 2002). The characteristics of the nontraditional student include:

- Entry to college delayed at least one year following high school,
- Having dependents,
- Being a single parent,
- Being employed full time,
- Being financially independent,
- Attending part time, and
- Not having a high school diploma. (Wirt, et al, p. 25)

The term adult student includes a range of individuals, identified by age, experience, background, and life circumstances (Aslanian, 2013; Kasworm, 2003b). Frequently, adults seek to participate in learning at a time and through a method that is different than the traditional-aged college student (Spaid & Duff, 2009).

Ross-Gordon (2011) discussed adult student re-entering the educational system in terms of the nontraditional learner. The economic and social forces that lead adults to return to college are not likely to diminish (Eduventure, 2012; Ellucian, 2014) and as a result, flexible adult-focused educational programs are still needed (Eduventures, 2012; Nesbit, 2001). "Re-entry adults' multiple roles and commitments increase the likelihood they will look for degree and

certificate programs that provide them flexibility in time and locations for both course completion and for access to key student services" (Ross-Gordon, 2011, p. 2).

Characteristics of Adult Learner

Two major reasons for adults to return to school include career advancement and personal satisfaction (Erisman, 2012). Despite these motivations, returning to school is still a voluntary activity (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Merriam et al. pointed out that, "Regardless of the study, the profile of the typical adult learner in formal educational activities remains remarkably consistent: white, middle-class, employed, younger, and better educated than the nonparticipant" (p. 78). Another study indicates that enrollment in postsecondary institutions among major ethnic categories will see a projected increase through 2022, including White, 7%, Black, 26%, Hispanic, 27%, and Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% (Hussar & Bailey, 2014).

Kasworm (2003b) argued the adult college student differs from younger college students by status of age, status of maturity and developmental complexity, and status of responsible and often-competing adult roles. These roles include work, family, community, and student commitments. Through long-term studies, Aslanian (2007) uncovered several characteristics of the adult student. One question examined was what drives adults to return to learning at a given time. Aslanian (2007) found a connection between the need for and potential of transformative learning. This connection was the occurrence of a trigger event, primarily in their professional lives, which drove a need to acquire new skills and knowledge in order to cope with and respond to the trigger event. Over the length of Aslanian's research the need to respond to trigger events remains constant; however, what did change was the demand for alternative scheduling formats. Adults surveyed in this research indicate a desire for short course schedules and an overall compressed timeframe to completion of the program.

Adult Participation in Higher Education

Higher education enrollment for students aged 25 to 34 increased by 35% between 2000 and 2014 (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). For students aged 35 and older, this figure was 23%. Enrollment of adults in postsecondary programs aged 25 to 34 is predicted to grow by 16% between 2014 and 2025 and the growth projection for students aged 35 and older is 20% (Hussar & Bailey, 2017). Johnson and Good (2011) conducted research on a population similar to that being examined in this study. Johnson and Good's first research question focused on factors that caused students to enroll in a degree completion program. Their second research question addressed the occurrence of a trigger event. Johnson and Good stated: "For some students earning a degree was a path to better career opportunities, and for others earning a degree was part of a journey toward self-acceptance and personal fulfillment" (p. 6).

Montanero (2012) offered an examination of why adults return to school in research that reveals "three critical factors needed to be present to ensure students have the best chance to attain their degree: Participation, persistence, and motivation" (pp. 1-2). The results from an Eduventures study (2008) showed the need for post-secondary education: "Ninety percent of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. now require some form of post-secondary education" (Eduventures, 2008, p. 2). The Eduventures (2008) study also reported a projected 14% growth in participation in education for adults aged 30 or older through 2016. Fry and Parker (2012) conducted a survey of the public perception of the necessity of a college education and according to this research, 73% of adults agreed "in order to get ahead in life these days, it's necessary to get a college education" (p. 8).

The Cohort Model of Instruction

Two reasons adults to return to school include career advancement and personal satisfaction (Erisman, 2012). Despite these motivations, returning to school is still a voluntary activity (Merriam et al., 2007). Merriam et al. pointed out that "Regardless of the study, the profile of the typical adult learner in formal educational activities remains remarkably consistent: white, middle-class, employed, younger, and better educated than the nonparticipant" (p. 78). Another study indicates that enrollment in postsecondary institutions among major ethnic categories will see a projected increase through 2022; White, 7%, Black, 26%, Hispanic, 27%, and Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% (Hussar & Baily, 2013).

Cohorts are utilized to group students together within an educational program and have been found to increase the leaners' effort and create more effective learning (Saltiel & Russo, 2001). Saltiel and Russo (2001) stated, "The structure of cohort programming promotes the exchange of ideas and critical feedback among students" (p. 1). While differences in classroom and program formats may exist, for example, accelerated and learning communities, they may be used within the context of cohort programming with an outcome of affecting change within individuals and organizations (Saltiel & Russo, 2001).

The use of the cohort model has become an accepted way of delivering adult programs (Boden & Spikes, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2005). It became especially popular as a model for program delivery to nontraditional students (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). A recent survey of four-year and graduate-level institutions found that 60% of private institutions and 59.5% of public institutions utilize this format in their nontraditional programs (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2015, pp. 19, 29). In adult education, cohorts have taken on an important role in promoting interaction, involvement, and a sense of cohesiveness among students (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998). Reynolds and Hebert (1998) described cohorts as "learning arrangements with required sequences of

courses and with student groups that stay intact throughout all or most of their coursework toward an academic degree or program completion" (p. 34). Their study looked at learning outcomes among cohort versus non-cohort students and found "that students in cohort groups experience greater in- and out-of-class interaction and greater group cohesiveness that those in non-cohort groups studying for the same degree" (p. 35).

From an institutional perspective, using cohorts for adult programs offers many administrative benefits, including the use of multiple start dates, thus enrolling students when they are ready instead of postponing a start until the next semester; streamlined processes for enrollment; greater use of adjunct instruction; and easier classroom scheduling (Spaid & Duff, 2009, pp. 106-107). In addition to administrative benefits, cohorts offer a sense of community and support among group members (Imel, 2002; Tisdell et al., 2002).

Spaid and Duff (2009) discussed the benefits of a cohort to students, including that classmates are known to each other as each class begins, eliminating the need to learn new names and faces for each class. Additionally, the stability and continuity provided via a cohort are not found in a traditional college program format and cohorts foster collaborative relationships. The study by Spaid and Duff (2009) revealed evidence of student cohesiveness that supported growth, "Each cohort member works collectively and collaboratively toward improving the learning experiences of all members" (p. 105). Cohorts are convenient, facilitate learning, and support collaboration, setting the groundwork for discourse and reflection (Boyd, 1990; Brooks, 1998; Lawrence, 1997; Nesbit, 2001). However, cohorts do not form without guidance (Imel, 2002). Success of the cohort is aided by being intentional about creating a structure that fosters learning and development (Imel, 2002). In one study, Reynolds and Hebert (1998) found that the use of cohorts enhanced the adult learning experience.

Research by Tisdell et al. (2002) indicated that students participating in a cohort benefited in their construction of individual and group knowledge. While adult education programs must fulfill the needs of the adult reacting to external motivating factors, what adult educators should also understand is that adults may also be seeking a community that can support a caring and emotional learning environment (Fleming, 2002). There is also evidence that utilizing a cohort format within adult education programs may enhance group communication, which leads to group cohesiveness, and in turn may increase group performance (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001). In this regard, the use of cohorts may benefit the students beyond the convenience factors of schedule, cost, and proximity to home or work (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001).

Drago-Severson et al. (2001) also found an association between external motivating factors and the non-stated, more personal benefits when researching cohort and collaborative groups including that the relationships developed among cohorts impact the students' academic learning and ability to broaden their perspective. The research by Drago-Severson et al. (2001) revealed that cohort interaction supported the concept of discourse and democratic participation through the sharing of ideas via dialogue and by listening to and considering the perspectives of others, which promoted learners extending their ideas beyond their existing way of knowing.

Lawrence (1997) conducted research and reported that students within a cohort experienced an increase in self-confidence and confirmed that students had learned from one another. Participating in a cohort was shown to assist students in experiencing transformative learning (Lawrence, 1997). Lawrence (1997) identified what may be occurring within cohorts: "Many students remark that their self-confidence has increased, sometimes dramatically, and

they acknowledge how much they have learned from each other…cohort participants admitted to undergoing what Mezirow (1991) referred to as transformative learning" (p. 1, 3).

Research conducted by Brooks (1998) sought to validate whether cohorts were facilitating personal growth and found that cohorts promoted learner empowerment, which lead to support among cohort members and a desire to provide learning conditions that would maintain this growth. The questionnaire used in Brooks' (1998) study included a section on the influence of the cohort on student learning experiences. Results from Brooks (1998) research indicated that, "Cohort groups seem to be committed to discovering conditions that bring out and support human learning and to providing these conditions" (p. 2).

Whelan and Lisk (2000) investigated students participating in an adult degree completion program to determine whether a relationship between the way the cohort functioned and the educational outcomes of the students existed. Their focus was on group productivity, but they also pointed out the utilization of cohorts in adult, degree completion programs.

Drago-Severson et al. (2001) found that cohorts form characteristics that set the stage for transformative learning by assisting students to become aware of their own perspectives and to become comfortable in sharing those perspectives with their peers. This interaction leads to a challenging of perspectives, consideration for the outlook of others, and a move to experiment and enact new ways of thinking and behaving.

Adult Degree Completion Programs

Immediately following World War II, earning a college degree shifted from being something for the privileged to something made available to a much broader population, including adult students (Maehl, 2004; Murry, & Hall, 1998). A large proportion of the adults in each study had started college but not completed a baccalaureate degree and now felt compelled

to complete that process (Hoyt & Allred, 2008; Maehl, 2004). As the 1980's approached, the percentage of adult college enrollments continued to grow, causing educational institutions to find new ways of addressing this growth (Maehl, 2004; Spaid & Duff, 2009). The adult degree completion program (ADCP) formed in a response to this growth and to a demand by students for programs that fit their adult perspective, which included previously earned college credit, life experience, and the need for part time educational opportunities (Maehl, 2004; Murry & Hall, 1998).

The ADCP utilizes a structure that often requires students to earn 60 credit hours or an associate's degree prior to admission to the program (Maehl, 2004). Spaid and Duff (2009) examined a program that utilized the ADCP model and requires at least 55 credit hours prior to admission. The requirement that students have some earned credit hours prior to admission make it possible for the adult student to complete a bachelor's degree in two years or fewer (Maehl, 2004). Other features of the ADCP were "…the security of predictable curricula, scheduling, procedures, and often guaranteed tuition rates for uninterrupted completion of the program" (p. 10). A common feature of the ADCP is the cohort structure (Maehl, 2004; Maher, 2005), which meets the students' needs and offered administrative and faculty benefits (Maher, 2005).

The ADCP became especially popular among faith-based colleges (Wlodkowski, 2003). In a report that assessed the quality of ADCP, J. Taylor (2000) found that 72% of institutions participating in the survey were private institutions. This is consistent with the research by Spaid and Duff (2009), which indicates that private colleges may act more quickly than public institutions to establish new programs.

Accelerated Programs

Pew Research (Fry & Parker, 2012) conducted a survey of the public perception of the necessity of a college education. According to this research, 73% of adults agreed "in order to get ahead in life these days, it's necessary to get a college education" (Fry & Parker, 2012, p. 8). An earlier Eduventures (2008) study supports the importance of achieving post-secondary education: "90% of the fastest growing jobs in the U.S. now require some form of post-secondary education" (p. 2). Primary among the reasons adult students select a degree completion program is convenient schedule and pacing (Eduventures, 2008; Hanover, 2012). Colleges have responded to this demand by implementing programs for adult students that incorporate these features (Hanover, 2012; Tweedell, 2000).

Adult degree programs are often associated with accelerated degree programs due to their truncated path to completion (Imel, 2002; Whelan & Lisk, 2000), which is also a common feature of cohort programs (Whelan & Lisk, 2000). For adults returning to school, whether an accelerated format is offered plays a role in school selection (Eduventures, 2008). This was confirmed in an online search of colleges and universities to be surveyed for this study. Brookfield (2003) showed that accelerated programs are closely aligned with the cohort model, which is a feature of the programs that will be utilized in this study.

Whelan and Lisk (2000) investigated "…the relationship between cohort group functioning and educational outcomes of student members participating in adult, accelerated degree completions programs" (p. 724). Their focus was on group productivity, but it revealed the proliferation of cohorts used in accelerated, degree completion programs. The research by Whelan and Lisk (2000) reported two reasons why accelerated programs utilize a cohort model. From a student perspective, cohorts may begin when a sufficient number of students apply and

are accepted for admission. From an administrative standpoint, cohort models make it easier to schedule the program and track individual student progress.

Wlodkowski (2003) found that accelerated programs tended to be classroom based, face-to-face instruction, and with formats developed to serve working adults. Wlodkowski's (2003) research helps inform the selection of institutions to be studied in this dissertation proposal.

Why Adults Return to School

What factors are driving the strong demand for adult programs? Adults see that having a college degree is critical to "getting ahead in life" (Fry & Parker, 2012, p. 2). Aslanian (2007) noted that: "The fastest growing job sectors will require workers with some college, increasingly a bachelor's degree" (p. 25). One survey (Eduventures, 2008) indicates that the most common reasons for adults to return to school are personal enrichment and career advancement. Another reason for returning to school is to satisfy the growing demands placed upon adults by society in terms of "work stability, financial support, and related life opportunities" (Kasworm, 2003b, p. 4). Adults also return to school due to some change in life's circumstances (Aslanian, 2007; Johnson & Good, 2011). Aslanian (2007) and Johnson and Good (2011) called these trigger events. The concept of trigger event is synonymous with the concept of disorienting dilemma within transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). While a trigger event may have been the impetus for an adult student to return to school, it is only the first phase in the transformative learning process (Mezirow, 2000).

In a survey conducted by Johnson and Good (2011), adults listed the following five reasons for returning to school to participate in an adult, degree-completion program:

1. The desire to earn a degree;
2. Trigger events that prompted a return to the university;

3. Professional factors that were goals and motivators for students;
4. Institutional factors that inhibited success in more traditional programs; and
5. Program features of adult-degree-completion programs that students found more attractive. (p. 4)

Flexibility in location, delivery times and format are key determinants for adults returning to higher education (Aslanian & Giles, 2008; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Studies by Ross-Gordon (2011) and Aslanian and Giles (2008) provide insights into why adults return to school, while Kiely, Sandmann and Truluck (2004) offered a different perspective from an earlier study. Kiely et al. (2004) examined the experiences of three adults who made the decision to earn a degree. The individual perspectives of the subjects surveyed in this research complement the findings in the studies by Aslanian (2007), Eduventures (2008), Fry and Parker (2012), Johnson and Good (2011), and Kasworn (2003b). There are several reasons students return to school: 1) to obtain an official credential required by the field in which the student is employed; 2) to facilitate a new career direction; or 3) to gain new skills and knowledge in order to advance in a current career (Kiely et al., 2004).

McGonigal (2005) described the act of simply acquiring new knowledge "assimilative learning" (p. 2). However, adult students often enter the classroom with some formal education and valued life experience. As a result, "…most courses require at least some level of transformative learning" (McGonigal, 2005, p. 2). Imel (1998) supports this, "Transformative learning explains how the meaning structures that adults have acquired over a lifetime become transformed" (p. 1).

Summary

Adult learners were returning to higher education in growing numbers. This growth was the result of motivating factors such as moving forward in a career and "getting ahead in life" (Fry & Parker, 2012, p. 2). As a result, higher education institutions were developing programs to meet their needs. These programs included degree completion programs and accelerated programs, of which many utilized a cohort model. The cohort model provided administrative benefits for the institution and benefits of convenience and predictability in length of program and time commitment for the students. Additionally, cohort learning lended itself to transformative learning by offering opportunities for interaction, reflection, and discourse. Cohorts offer collaborative relationships and have been known to enhance the adult learning experience.

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine whether adult students participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs experienced transformative learning. Using the Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997, 2009) this research sought to measure whether students reported experiencing transformative learning and the relationship of that experience to learning activities. Enrollment trends continue to reflect a growing adult population, making up 40% of all postsecondary students (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). In an effort to meet rising demand and capitalize on the opportunity to provide adult-specific programs, schools may be focusing more on the administrative benefits and the highly structured format of degree completion programs and diminishing the opportunity for adults to learn and grow beyond course content (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). This chapter presented the rationale for research design selection and methodology; the survey instrument; research questions; sampling method; and data collection and analysis.

E. W. Taylor (2000) found that few studies measuring the occurrence of transformative learning have been conducted and recommended, in addition to qualitative research, analyzing transformative learning experiences utilizing learner demographic data as variables, consistent with the design of the survey instrument that will be used in this study. Brock et al. (2011) conducted a study to determine whether the ten precursor steps outlined by Mezirow (1978) could predict the occurrence of transformative learning. Their research was limited to traditional, undergraduate students and they found that students reporting having experienced any of the ten steps did predict the occurrence of transformative learning and recommended further research to include other populations of learners. In an update to the 2000 review, E.W. Taylor (2007) reported that transformative learning, within adult education, remained the most

researched adult learning theory. Merriam (2008) reported that within adult education research there is an emphasis on attending to the context where learning takes place. In a review of ten research articles, Snyder (2008) found that transformative learning had become a staple among adult education researchers and also identified context, learner self-reflection, and critical discourse as three requirements that must be met for transformative learning to occur.

Research Questions

The questions that guide this study are:

RQ1. Did adults participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs at faith-based institutions experience transformative learning as outlined by the Learning Activities Survey (King, 2009)?

RQ2. Did participation in learning activities predict the incidence of transformative learning?

H_0. There was no statistically significant relationship between participation in learning activities and the incidence of transformative learning.

RQ3. Did the incidence of transformative learning vary based on age.

H_0. There was no statistically significant relation between age and the occurrence of transformative learning.

RQ4. Did the incidence of transformative learning vary based on gender?

H_0. There was no statistically significant relation between gender and the occurrence of transformative learning.

RQ5. Did the incidence of transformative learning vary based on length of time in the degree program?

H_0. There was no statistically significant relation between length of time in the degree program and the occurrence of transformative learning.

Support of Research Questions

Research question one examined whether adults participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs at faith-based institutions experienced transformative learning. This study continued the along the theme of King's (1997) research; King surveyed adult students enrolled in traditional, four-year college programs. Similarly, all the studies cited in Table 2.1 examined transformative learning in higher education settings, but none sought to measure the occurrence of transformative learning within an adult degree completion program. This study extended the inquiry of transformative learning by focusing on adult students participating in cohort-based degree completion programs.

In regard to research question two, many researchers (e.g., Brock, 2007, Caruana, 2011, Ellis, 2012, King, 1997, Kumi-Yeboah, 2012, and Schwartz, 2013) included assessment of the role of learning activities in transformative learning. Ellis (2012) found the activities had an influence on those reporting having experienced transformative learning, as did Caruana (2011). In particular, Caruana (2011) found activities where students felt supported and actively engaged were especially impactful. Kumi-Yeboah (2012) and Brock (2007) each reported that learning activities supported the occurrence of transformative learning.

Research question three explores whether demographic elements had any impact on the occurrence of transformative learning. King (1997) examined six demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, race, sex, education, and major, with length of time in education

being measured in semesters in keeping with the traditional nature of student programs. Studies by Brock (2007), Caruana (2011), Kumi-Yeboah (2012), Schwartz (2013), and Wansick (2007) utilized demographic data when reporting survey results. In particular, length in program or number of semesters (Brock, 2007; Wansick, 2007); gender (Brock, 2007; Caruana, 2011; Kumi-Yeboah, 2012; Schwartz, 2013), and age (Caruana, 2011; Kumi-Yeboah, 2012; Schwartz, 2013; Wansick, 2007) were all examined.

Research Design

This study was intended to add to the research on transformative learning in adult students participating in cohort-based degree completion programs. It examined the occurrence of transformative learning for adult higher education students participating in degree completion programs and the impact of learning activities to transformative learning. This was accomplished by first determining whether transformative learning occurred for adult students participating in a cohort-based, degree completion program. Next, the relationship between learning activities and the occurrence of transformative learning was measured. Finally, the occurrence of transformative learning was compared among individuals based on gender, age, and length of time in the degree program (Fig. 3.1).

This study utilized a quantitative method to determine whether independent variables – learning activities (two); age; gender; or length of time in program – had an effect on the dependent variable, identified as transformative learning. Both independent and dependent variables were measured using the Learning Activities Survey (LAS) (King, 1997, 2009).

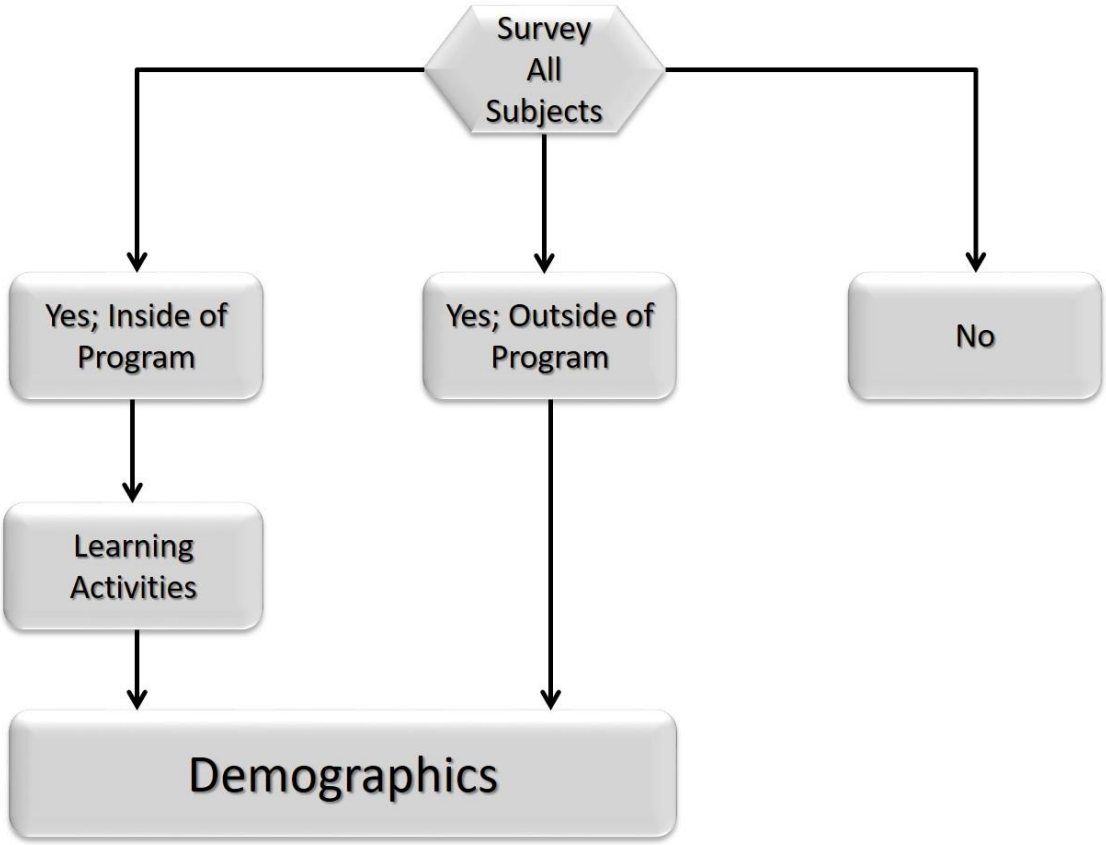


Figure 3-1 Diagram of Research Methodology

"Educational research is done either to describe educational phenomenon or to discover relationships between variables. The relationships between variables of greatest interest to educators are those involving cause and effect" (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 536). To deepen and extend the research of transformative learning among adult students, this research study employs an ex post facto method (Gay et al., 2006), which is intended to attempt to explain differences between or among groups when experimental research is impractical or inappropriate. "In causal comparative research, or *ex post facto research*, the researcher attempts to determine the cause, or reason, for existing difference in the behavior or status of groups" (Gay et al., 2006, p. 217, italics in original).

Adult students enrolled in a cohort-based, degree completion program were surveyed using the LAS. From this population, it was anticipated three groups would emerge; those who experienced transformative learning related to their educational experience, those who believed they experienced transformative learning unrelated to their educational program, and those who did not experience transformative learning (King, 2009). Ex post facto research facilitates the examination of multiple groups. The use of this method was intended to overcome the lack of a pre-test opportunity and the lack of randomization of the sample population (Gay et al., 2006).

To conduct a valid survey, an existing data collection instrument must be utilized or an instrument must be developed (Gay et al., 2006). For this study the instrument measured the incidence of transformative learning and was designed for adult students. The LAS (King, 1997, 2009) met these criteria. King categorizes learning activities into either classroom assignments or support. Sub-categories are more specific and include "…critical thinking assignments, class discussion, student self-assessment, discovery of one's voice, and miscellaneous learning activities" (pp. 16-17). Item 4 of the survey "facilitate[s] examination of the contribution that the learning activities have in transformative learning experiences" (p. 17). This includes the contribution of activities related to cohort support and instructor.

Critical reflection and critical self-reflection are shown to be instrumental components for facilitating transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003). Students who indicated they experienced transformative learning were correlated to whether they identified critical reflection learning activities as having had an impact on their experience. Brooks (1998) conducted research to validate whether being a member of a cohort facilitated personal development. Brooks (1998) found the cohort had a significant level of influence regarding the following:

- Enriching the learning experience
- Developing mutual respect between instructor and learners
- Developing new perspectives on learning style and needs
- Improving critical judgment
- Improving conflict-resolution skills. (p. 69)

Brooks' (1998) research revealed how a cohort contributes to the transformative experience of individuals. One aspect of this research study is to determine which learning activities facilitated transformative learning, including classroom activities and support. Critical thinking and critical discourse are meaningful components of transformative learning (Brooks, 1998), and the LAS includes questions to account for these components (King, 2009).

E.W. Taylor (2000) recommended that further research in the area of transformative learning should utilize innovative design and noted a lack of quantitative studies. In this study multiple groups will be surveyed and the specific components of critical thinking will be incorporated to address the recommendations of E.W. Taylor (2000). King (2009) also recommended further research utilizing the LAS, which may include enhancements to the survey to account for diverse settings.

Participants

Sample Frame

Based in part on this researcher's experience administrating and teaching in an adult degree completion program, an online search was conducted to identify colleges and universities that offer adult, degree completion programs that employ a cohort method of instruction. The search was limited to not-for-profit, faith-based institutions. Based on this search, it was discovered that the type of program examined in this study is widely offered by private, liberal

arts institutions. This was consistent with the concept that private universities can move more quickly than public institutions in creating and implementing new programs; and the financial benefits associated with year-round programming that proves a steady income stream for smaller, tuition-dependent institutions (Spaid & Duff, 2009). It was also consistent with the results of a survey conducted by Ruffalo Noel Levitz (2015) that private institutions have engaged in providing adult degree programs for more than ten years longer when compared to public institutions. The institutions were selected based on the following criteria: The institution offered an undergraduate, adult degree completion program; the program utilized a cohort model of instruction; the program was offered on campus in a face-to-face setting; and, an admission requirement that adults must have completed some college credit prior to enrollment. The online search resulted in the selection of 12 universities (Appendix C) with programs matching the selection criteria. Of those, six agreed to participate in the study.

Sample Size

Sample size was calculated using guidelines developed by Peduzzi, Concato, Kemper, Holford, and Feinstein (1996). According to Peduzzi et al. two pieces of information are needed to determine the estimated sample size. The first piece of information needed was the number of independent variables (IVs). There were five independent variables in this study. The independent variables were learning activities (support or classroom), age, gender, and length of time in the program.

The second piece of information needed was the smallest estimated percentage of respondents. Specifically, based on Figure 3.1, participant responses could be one of the three possibilities: Students who reported experiencing transformative learning related to the education experience (PT3); students who reported experiencing transformative learning outside of the

formal education experience (PT2); and students who reported not experiencing transformative learning (PT1). A certain percentage of respondents chose one of these three possibilities. The smallest percentage of respondents helped determine the sample size needed.

This estimated percentage of respondents was determined through the prior empirical studies. A review of studies examining adult populations in educational settings (Glisczinski, 2005; Kumi-Yegboah, 2012; King, 1997; Wansick, 2007) showed that on average, 36% of survey respondents experience transformative learning as a result of participation in an educational program (PT3). In one study (Schwartz, 2013) this figure was only 7%, while Caruana et al. (2015) reported that 71% of respondents experienced transformative learning. King (1997) determined a ratio of 2.5:1 would predict the number of survey respondents indicating they had experienced transformative learning. Brock (2007) conducted a power analysis that determined at least 200 respondents were necessary to achieve a power factor of .80 at an alpha level of .05. Given the variability across different studies (Glisczinski, 2005; Kumi-Yegboah, 2012; King, 1997; Wansick, 2007), the average 36% will be used as the estimated percentage of respondents who experience transformative learning through participation in an educational program (PT3). The rest of respondents (64%) are projected to either experience transformative learning outside of the educational experience (PT2) or do not experience transformative learning (PT1). Little research was found on the percentage of respondents from PT2 or PT1 category. Therefore, the 64% was divided evenly into the PT2 and PT1 groups. That is, 32% of respondents are projected to experience transformative learning outside of the educational experience (PT2) and the other 32% are projected to not experience transformative learning (PT3). The smallest percentage of respondents is 32%. Using five IVs and the smallest percentage, .32, the calculation is:

$$10\left(\frac{IVs}{\begin{matrix}smallest\ percentage\\ of\ respondents\end{matrix}}\right) = sample\ size$$

$$10\left(\frac{5}{.32}\right) = 156.25$$

Therefore, a sample size of at least 157 will be required.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling was used for this study. "Purposive sampling...is the process of selecting a sample that is *believed* to be representative of a given population" (Gay et al., 2006, p. 113, italics in original). The overall sampling procedure included the following steps. An administrator at each institution was contacted and the details of the research were provided. The site administrator was asked to forward an email containing a brief explanation of the research and a link to the online survey. Based on this distribution method, the sample size is unknown. All results were combined to form the initial group. The sample was then sorted based on whether the respondents experienced transformative learning, did not experience transformative learning, or experienced transformative learning unrelated to participation in the degree completion program.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data for this research study was collected utilizing Qualtrics, a Web-enabled survey tool. The LAS questions were entered into Qualtrics® and corresponding variables were established and entered into IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences® (SPSS), a statistical analysis software program. Survey participants accessed the instrument via a provided, secure, Web link.

Responses were stored in Qualtrics until the survey was closed and imported into SPSS for analysis.

Approval to conduct the research was received from the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University. Institutions selected for this survey were not identified in the survey. Qualtrics generated an ID number for each submitted survey but did not capture or include any identifiable personal information. A pilot study was conducted to identify issues with the survey questionnaire. Pilot participants were selected from among staff and students at colleges or universities that offered adult, degree-completion programs. Survey results are stored on a CD-ROM for a minimum of three years. The disc will be maintained with other survey materials by the researcher. A file containing the names and locations of the institutions is stored on the CD-ROM, as well, along with copies of all Institutional Review Board documents.

Cohort students who were at any stage of program were surveyed. King (2009) acknowledged that, "objectives and evaluations of transformative learning can be best examined over the span of several courses" (p. 34). This is consistent with the concept that transformation may occur due to a disorienting dilemma – a trigger event – or as a result of an accumulation of experiences that combine to foster transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009). It is also consistent with the previous research conducted using the LAS (King, 1997, 2009). "The instrument focuses on *any* transformative learning within the adult education experience…Within this context, adult students frequently refer to experiences from previous classes, semesters, or learning experiences" (King, 2009, pp. 32-33, italics in original). Therefore, the length of time in the program was examined to predict whether students experienced transformative learning. The data was collected at a single point in time rather than longitudinally, making this a cross-sectional survey.

An email outlining the following items was used to solicit student participation (see Appendix D): The purpose of the survey; a request for participation; an explanation of how to access the survey; the methods used to ensure anonymity; and any access or time limitations will be explained. The first question of the survey clearly stated that by participating in the survey respondents were providing informed consent. The student may elect not to participate by selecting "no" at this point (see Appendix B). The student was directed immediately to the end of the survey and no survey data was captured. To avoid any reactive arrangement that might bias the responses, the explanation was worded to provide encouragement to participate without driving particular types of responses. Enough participants were selected to allow data to be collected for the following survey options:

- Respondent experienced transformative learning and related the experience to program activities;
- Respondent experienced transformative learning outside the program;
- Respondent did not experience transformative learning.

As an incentive, a VISA™ gift card valued at $25 was awarded to five participants selected from among those who provide name and contact information. Names and contact information was not linked to any survey response ensuring respondents remained anonymous. The incentive was designed to drive participation at each institution while maintaining the anonymity of the participants.

Instrumentation

The LAS (King, 1997, 2009) will be used to provide data on the experience of transformative learning. The LAS (King, 1997, 2009) was developed to detect, identify, and categorize transformative learning experiences in higher education incorporating a quantitative

approach. The theoretical foundation of the LAS (King, 1997, 2009) is the work of Mezirow (1978, 1991), Cranton (1994), as well as Brookfield (1986, 1987, 1995). A primary desired outcome of the LAS is to "identify whether adult students have had a transformative learning in relation to their educational experience; and, if so, determine what learning activities have contributed to it" (King, 2009, p. 14) and to quantify the impact of critical thinking learning activities – an independent variable – in fostering transformative learning. Early research results from King (1997) validated the "…benefit of studying this phenomenon more closely in order to better understand and, ultimately, serve the adult student" (p. 30). When examining which learning activities contributed to transformative learning, it was discovered that critical thinking played a significant role in the process. "These findings indicate that adult educators should include frequent and varied critical thinking learning activities" (King, 1997, p. 30). King recommended the research should be replicated "in other settings and among different population" (p. 31).

Cheney (2010) reviewed the literature on the empirical measurement of transformative learning. In operationalizing transformative learning, Cheney found that "for authors who based their studies on transformative learning theory, their conclusions about the existence and degree of perspective change were based on general similarities between their study outcomes and the overall concepts associated with transformative learning" (p. 4). While this conclusion is valid for those studies included in Cheney's review, no studies employing the LAS (King, 1997, 2009) were examined. The LAS brings consistency to the types of activities measured with a correlation to the precursor experiences of transformative learning (King, 2009).

King (2009) summarized the process and the potential of adults to experience transformative learning. This summary indicates that group participation is important to the

process. “Transformative learning describes experiences that adult students may have as they examine previously unquestioned assumptions, try out new strategies, views and approaches, initiate and ultimately transition to a significantly new place in their understanding of values, beliefs, assumptions, themselves, and their world” (p. 4).

Mezirow (2000) identified the characteristics of meaning involved in transformative learning. They are:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspectives (p. 22)

In the LAS, King (2009) has correlated particular questions to each of the ten steps, or stages, of transformative learning (Table 3.1):

Table 3.1 Phases of Transformative Learning

Mezirow's (2000) Ten phases of Transformative learning Matched to King's (2009) Learning Activities Survey statements (p. 22)	
Transformative Learning Phase	**LAS Statement Item**
1. A disorienting dilemma	2a & 2b
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame	2c & 2d
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, socio-cultural, or psychic assumptions	2g
4. A recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change	2e
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions	2f
6. Planning of a course of action	2i
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans	2j
8. Provisional trying of new roles	2h
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	2k
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective	2l

Through this correlation King devised a PT Index scale (Table 3.2) "which indicates whether learners had a transformative learning experience in relation to their education" (King, 2009, pp. 15-16). It is a three-point scale ranging from: PT3 = experienced transformative learning related to the education experience; PT2 = experienced transformative learning outside of the formal education experience; and PT1 = did not experience transformative learning (King, 2009, p. 16). The relationship among the questions served to diagnose and affirm the occurrence of transformative learning. Questions one, two, three and ten of the LAS confirmed whether the adult student recognized and understood the transformative learning experience (King, 2009).

Table 3.2 PT Index

PT Index Derived from LAS (King, 2009)	
Index	**Survey Response**
PT3	One or more items from Q1 and Yes in Q2; text response in Q3 to confirm
PT2	Yes in Q2 and associated with significant change; Positive response to Q8
PT1	Select item M in Q1; Select No in Q2

Questions four and eleven of the survey were open-ended questions designed to confirm whether that the respondents' transformational learning experience is related to their educational experience (King, 2009) and were not included in the analysis. The questions "…provide opportunity for personalized descriptions and details" (p. 16) of the transformative learning experience. Question 10, in particular, was utilized to establish internal consistency (King, 1997). Survey participants did not need to have experienced every phase of transformative learning in order to respond that they experienced a transformation (King, 2009). The combination of responses as outlined in Table 3.2 that equated to PT3 or PT2, and confirmed through responses to additional survey questions, is enough to indicate a transformative learning experience.

Brock et al. (2011) conducted research "to confirm to the value of the 10 precursor steps proposed by Mezirow (1978) in predicting transformative learning" (pp. 1-2). Brock et al. (2011) found that the precursor steps did predict transformative learning: "Checking any of them predicted transformative learning and checking none predicted *not* reporting transformative learning" (p. 4, italics in original).

Validity

The foundation for the Learning Activities Survey (King, 2009) was the work of Mezirow (1978; 1991), Cranton (1994), and Brookfield (1986; 1987; 1995), with additional input provided by Williams (1985) and Baxter Magolda (1992). The LAS was validated using several procedures. These included multiple pilot studies and expert panel review. A pilot survey was conducted and results reviewed to assess the "…clarity, vocabulary, format, and time duration of the sample questionnaire" (King, 1997, p. 30). In addition, "The stages of transformative learning…were correlated pair wise and found to demonstrate a broad and consistent characterization of responses" (King, 2009, p. 41). Among several pilot studies conducted, the largest included 701 distributions resulting in 471 eligible responses. The results of this pilot showed "37.3% of the adult students had a transformative learning in their education experience and that critical thinking skills were consistently high contributors to the transformative learning process" (King, 2009, p. 43). In many of the studies, follow up interviews with selected participants were conducted to further clarify and ensure accurate interpretation and application of results. From these assessments and pilot, the LAS format was finalized. King (1997, 1998) also identified participant anonymity as a component for protecting against threats to internal validity.

Reliability

A test is considered to be reliable if it consistently measures whatever it is designed to measure (Gay et al., 2006). Reliability was addressed from a "hermeneutical perspective" (King, 2009, p. 42). Several individual evaluations were used to arrive at the final evaluation. "Hermeneutics has come to refer to the study of the process by which individuals arrive at the meaning of any text" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 520). In this case, the LAS was tested, reviewed, and

refined so that it measured the components and activities taken as evidence of transformative learning. This perspective strengthens the reliability of the LAS.

In addition, Ellis (2012) utilized the LAS and found it to be an accepted instrument within transformative learning literature. Ellis concluded her research could be replicated with 100% accuracy if the LAS were implemented as indicated by King (2009).

Analysis

King (2009) suggests the use of descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviation, and frequencies, for initial analysis. Demographic data is analyzed for individual effects and relationships utilizing Pearson chi-square analysis.

> Individual effects are studied with the use of cross tabulations and chi-squared tests of significance between each of the demographics and those with a PT-index of 3 (experienced transformative learning); PT-2, (those who experienced transformative learning not associated with their education); and PT-1 (those who did not experience transformative learning). (King, 2009, p. 39)

This approach is reflected in other studies utilizing the LAS (Brock, 2007; Glisczinski, 2005; Wansick, 2007). Virtually all studies referenced for this project involved single-group populations as opposed to multiple or control group surveys. Analysis included any correlation between PT-3 and learning activities and PT-2 and learning activities. The survey instrument separated activities in such a way that some were dependent upon group support (i.e., effect of cohort) and individualized assignments (not cohort dependent).

Survey responses were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics v. 25 and analyzed to establish any relationships among the variables. First, results were categorized according the PT Index. The PT Index is a single score derived from items two, three, four and eleven on the Learning

Activities Survey. Question three was coded by theme by the researcher and the data was used to confirm the occurrence of transformative learning. Second, descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviations and frequencies were calculated for each PT Index. The Learning Activities Survey was correlated with each PT Index score to gain a better understanding of what learning experiences were identified as contributing to transformative learning. Demographic data were an important component of the LAS. King's recommendation was that "individual effects are studied with the use of cross-tabulations and chi-squared tests of significance between each of the demographics and those with PT-index of one and three" (King, 2009, p. 39).

Protection of Human Rights

Application to the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board was received to conduct research at KSU. Institutional Review Board application to participating institutions was also made, depending on each institution's requirements. The first question of the survey contained an informed consent question enabling participants to decline the survey. Results from each institution were aggregated and cannot be linked to any institution or individual.

Summary

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to investigate the occurrence of transformative learning in adults participating in degree completion programs utilizing a cohort model of instruction. The investigation was conducted using the Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997). Participation in learning activities was compared for students claiming to have experienced transformative learning.

CHAPTER 4 - Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine whether adults enrolled in cohort-based, degree completion education programs at faith-based colleges and universities, experience transformative learning and if such experience can be predicted or explained by participation in particular learning activities. In this chapter the researcher provides an analysis of the data collected via the Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997, 2009) and presents the findings. First, survey returns and demographic data will be described. Next, survey results relating to research question one indicating whether students experienced transformative learning are presented. Next, the relationship between learning activities and the occurrence of transformative learning (research question two) is described. Finally, the data indicating the occurrence of transformative learning will be presented and compared among individuals based on gender, age, and length of time in the degree program (research questions three, four, and five).

Demographic Description

Based in part on this researcher's experience administrating and teaching in an adult degree completion program, an online search was conducted to identify colleges and universities that offer adult, degree completion programs that employ a cohort method of instruction. Initially, the search included a variety of institutions, both public and private. In keeping with the research, programs under study were mainly found at faith-based institutions. As a result, institutions selected for this study were not-for-profit, faith-based institutions. Six institutions agreed to include their adult students in the survey. The survey was built in Qualtrics, an online survey tool. It was distributed to an administrative contact at each institution for distribution to

adult students participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs. Response numbers were:

- 171 surveys were submitted and one respondent declined to complete the survey *(N=171)*;
- Although consent was provided, 35 surveys were not completed and they were discarded;
- 135 surveys were completed;
- An unexpected group emerged from the surveys; 38 respondents did not claim to have experienced transformative learning in survey question two, however, each respondent completed the survey and indicated having experienced aspects of transformative learning; this group was designated PT0;
- The final number representing PT3 (56), PT2 (12), PT1 (29), and PT0 (38) is (*n=135*).

New Group Identified

When reviewing survey results, responses were placed into categories as outlined in Chapter Three, including PT3, PT2, and PT1. After sorting, 38 respondents with similar profiles, but not fitting into previously defined categories, emerged and were assigned a new group designation: PT0. These individuals responded to survey question one by selecting a statement that equates to a stage of transformative learning (King, 2009; Mezirow, 2000), yet they responded to survey question two negatively, indicating they did not believe they had experienced a time when they realized their values, beliefs, opinions, or expectations had changed while in the program. However, all 38 respondents completed the survey and characterized themselves as those who engaged in reflection. Responses to survey question 11

and 12 indicated respondents utilized thinking and reflective practices when considering past behavior as well as the meaning of their studies, which are indicative of the critical reflection aspect of transformative learning (Brown, 2005; King, 2009; Mezirow, 2003). Additionally, 23 students (60.5%) indicated they had experienced a disorienting dilemma during the time they were in the program. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma is a key factor in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000).

All four groups were combined and analyzed for the independent variables of age, gender, and length of time in the program. Group PT0 was then analyzed independently concerning whether the respondents experienced a phase of transformative learning, whether they used reflective practices aligned with transformative learning, and whether they experienced a disorienting dilemma while in the program. Based on the design of the survey and the indication they did not experience transformative learning, the responses were not be combined with the other groups for analysis in research questions one and two.

Age

The age range of respondents was 21 to 65. Age categories were created for analysis (King, 1997). The categories and means are described in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2. Sixteen participants did not respond to the question. As described in Table 4.1, 21.5% of respondents were in the 21-29 age range; 24.4% of respondents were in the 30-39 age range: 28.9% were in the 40-49 range; 8.9% reported to be in the 50-59 age range; and 4.4% indicated being age 60 or older. Responses left blank represented 11.9% of the total. The average age was just over 39 (Table 4.2), with the largest number of respondents (39%) in the 40 – 49 age range.

Table 4.1 Age Categories

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	21 - 29	29	21.5
	30 - 39	33	24.4
	40 - 49	39	28.9
	50 - 59	12	8.9
	60 or Older	6	4.4
	Blank	16	11.9
	Total	135	100.0

Table 4.2 Median Ages

	Ages
Mean	39.21
Median	38.00
Std. Deviation	11.047

The frequency of responses for each PT group is described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Age Responses

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	PT0	38	28.1
	PT1	29	21.5
	PT2	12	8.9
	PT3	56	41.5
	Total	135	100.0

To understand how the survey respondents compared to age categories for higher education at large, statistics compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics (McFarland, et al., 2019) were utilized. The NCES figures describe participation in higher education at private, not-for-profit institutions and break down the categories as 25 – 29, 27%; 30 – 39, 32%; age 40 and over, 30% (McFarland, et al., 2019, p. 173). The NCES categories do

not match exactly to the survey categories. The institutions surveyed for this study appear to attract a larger proportion of students age 40 and above (Fig. 4.1).

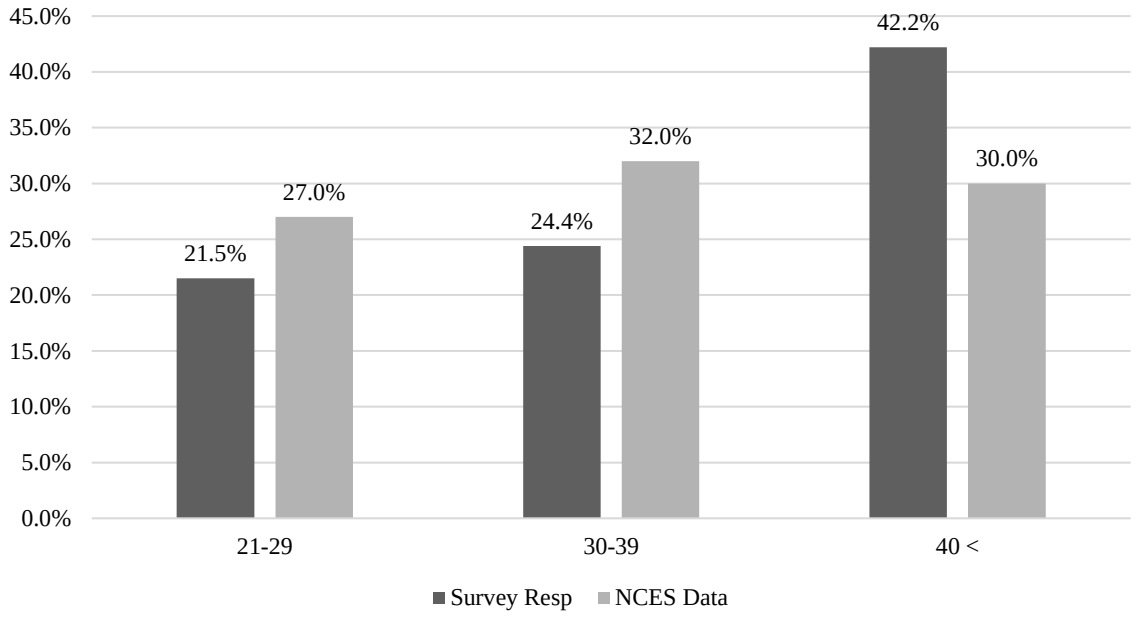


Figure 4-1 Age Category Comparisons

Gender

The survey requested gender information from each respondent. The response options for this question were Female, Male, or Blank / Preference Not Listed. The percentages were 61.5% female; 26.7% male; and 11.9% were left blank or their preference was not listed. Table 4.4 describes the responses by PT group and Table 4.5 reports the frequencies for gender responses.

Table 4.4 Gender Responses

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	PT0	38	28.1
	PT1	29	21.5
	PT2	12	8.9
	PT3	56	41.5
	Total	135	100.0

Table 4.5 Gender Identification

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	83	61.5
	Male	36	26.7
	Blank / Preference not list	16	11.9
	Total	135	100.0

Survey responses were not associated with the institutions and results cannot be linked to an individual. However, aggregated data for fall, 2018 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018), for the entire undergraduate student population of each school indicates a female population of 53% and a male population of 47%. The ratio of female / male students is greater in the adult, degree completion programs than in the general student population. Figures published by NCES (McFarland, et al., 2019) are fairly consistent with the data reported by the subject institutions: Female students comprised 56% of the total student population in higher education, and males comprised 44%.

Length of Time in Program

King (1997) examined demographic characteristics, including length of time in the degree program. In the original study (King, 1997) the length of time was measured in semesters which reflected the traditional nature of student programs. Adult degree completion programs typically do not follow traditional semesters (Imel, 2002; Spaid and Duff, 2009; Whelan & Lisk,

2000). As a result, the survey asked respondents to indicate how long, in months, they had been in the program. This is in keeping with King's (2009) recommendation that "…objectives and evaluations of perspective transformation can be best examined over the span of several courses, because time is an important element in identifying perspective transformation" (p. 34).

Table 4.6 displays the frequency of responses for each PT category. In Table 4.7, the frequencies are reported for length of time in the program. Length of time in program attempts to explain whether different conditions impact results (King, 2009). Any correlation between length of time in program and the incidence of transformative learning will be examined in response to research question five.

Table 4.6 Length of Time in Program Responses

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	PT0	38	28.1
	PT1	29	21.5
	PT2	12	8.9
	PT3	56	41.5
	Total	135	100.0

Table 4.7 Length of Time in Program Categories

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0 -6 Months	30	22.2
	7 - 12 Months	38	28.1
	13 - 24 Months	35	25.9
	25 Months or More	16	11.9
	Blank	16	11.9
	Total	135	100.0

Ethnicity

Respondents were asked to provide ethnicity information as one of the demographic measures, although ethnicity was not one of the components examined in the research questions.

However, ethnicity may be considered as a topic for future research of adults participating in degree completion programs. The number of respondents for each group is reported in Table 4.8. The reported frequency for each ethnic category is described in Table 4.9.

Table 4.8 Ethnicity Responses

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	PT0	38	28.1
	PT1	29	21.5
	PT2	12	8.9
	PT3	56	41.5
	Total	135	100.0

Table 4.9 Ethnicity Categories

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	White/Caucasian	70	51.9
	African American	33	24.4
	Hispanic	7	5.2
	Native American	1	.7
	Other / Do not wish to respond	9	6.7
	Blank	15	11.1
	Total	135	100.0

The aggregated ethnicity statistics for the survey responses are found in Table 4.10 as well as a comparison to combined figures for the general population of the institutions. *Survey responses were not sorted by institution.* This table compares the aggregated survey responses with the aggregated ethnicity data for the general student population at each institution.

Table 4.10 Institution Ethnicity Comparison

Survey Responses		Institution General Population	
White/Caucasian	51.9%	White	59%
African American	24.4%	African American	13%
Hispanic	5.2%	Hispanic	9%
Native American	.7%	Native American	2%
Asian	0	Asian	2%
Pacific Islander	0	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
Other / Do not wish to respond	6.7%	Unknown / Two or More	11%
Blank	11.1%		

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2018, Data Feedback Report.

The degree programs utilized in this research survey were campus-based programs, with students meeting regularly in cohorts. Recruiting for these programs typically takes place within proximity of the campus since adult students searching for a degree completion program cite convenience as a determining factor (Kasworm, 2003a). The reasons for selecting a college or university cited by traditional students vary widely. In one survey (Sallie Mae/Ipsos, 2016) location was cited fifth from among the top six reasons. In another survey (Bhardwa, 2017) location was not listed from among 11 reasons students select a college or university. A detailed study of the demographics of the communities surrounding each institution and an examination of each institution's traditional student recruiting territory would need to be undertaken to determine whether recruiting practices played a role in the ethnic make-up of each student population.

Research Question One

Transformative Learning

Research question one asked whether students participating in an adult, degree completion program experienced transformative learning. The response to this question was derived via survey questions one and two. Students in the PT3 category indicated they

experienced transformative learning related to their educational experience. Students in the PT2 category indicated they experienced transformative learning, but in a way not directly related to their educational experience. Students in the PT1 category indicated they did not experience transformative learning. In keeping with the research question and guidance on the use of the survey instrument, only responses in the PT3, PT2, and PT1 categories were analyzed for transformative learning.

When calculating the sample size, it was determined that 36% of respondents would indicate having experienced transformative learning through participation in an educational program (PT3). The rest of the respondents (64%) were projected to either experience transformative learning outside of the educational experience (PT2) or to not experience transformative learning (PT1). Since little research was found on the percentage of respondents from PT2 or PT1 category, the 64% was divided evenly into the PT2 and PT1 groups. That is, 32% of respondents were projected to experience transformative learning outside of the educational experience (PT2) and the other 32% were projected to not experience transformative learning (PT1).

Survey results (Table 4.11) indicated that 56 students (57.7%) experienced transformative learning related to their educational experience (PT3). There were 12 students in the PT2 category (12.4%) who experienced transformative learning unrelated to their educational program. There were 29 students (29.9%) who did not experience transformative learning (PT1). Combined, 68 respondents, or 70.1% of students, reported to have experienced transformative learning. The results indicated that adult students participating in a cohort-based, degree completion program do experience transformative learning. However, the results may not be

generalized to students outside of this survey due to the specific requirements of research question one and the limit of the sample size.

Table 4.11 Students Reporting Having Experienced Transformative Learning

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	PT1 (no)	29	29.9
	PT2 (yes)	12	12.4
	PT3 (yes)	56	57.7
	Total	97	100.0

To review survey results, responses were categorized as outlined in Chapter Three, including PT3, PT2, and PT1. After sorting the data, 38 respondents with similar profiles but not fitting any of the three expected categories emerged and were assigned a new group designation, PT0. The individuals in group PT0 responded to survey question one by selecting a statement that equates to a phase of transformative learning (King, 2009; Mezirow, 2000) yet responded to survey question two in the negative, indicating they did not believe they had experienced a time when they realized their values, beliefs, opinions, or expectations had changed. However, all 38 respondents completed the survey and characterized themselves as people who engage in thinking or reflective practices. Responses to survey question 11 (Table 4.12) and survey question 12 (Table 4.13) indicated respondents utilized "think about" or reflective practices when considering past behavior as well as the meaning of their studies, which are indicative of the critical reflection aspect of transformative learning (Brown, 2005; King, 2009; Mezirow, 2003).

In response to survey question 11, 100% of the respondents answered "yes."

Table 4.12 Thinking Practices and Length of Time in Program

Thinking Practices and Length of Time in Program

		Think About	
		Yes	Total
Length of Time in Program	0 - 6	8	8
Months	7 - 12	14	14
	13 - 24	12	12
	25 or more	4	4
Total		38	38

In response to survey question 12, 92.1% of the respondents answered "yes." Frequencies are presented in Table 4.13 and in Table 4.14 in relation to length of time in the program.

Table 4.13 Reflective Practices Responses

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	No	3	7.9
	Yes	35	92.1
	Total	38	100.0

Survey Question 12: Would you say that you frequently reflect upon the meaning of your studies for yourself, from a personal perspective?

Table 4.14 Reflective Practices and Length of Time in Program

Reflective Practices and Length of Time in Program

		Reflects		
		No	Yes	Total
Length of Time in Program	0 - 6	1	7	8
Months	7 - 12	0	14	14
	13 - 24	2	10	12
	25 or more	0	4	4
Total		3	35	38

Reflection is a component of transformative learning (Brown, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 2003). A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether students in this survey utilized reflective

practices as part of their educational experience and whether reflection was significant in the experience of transformative learning. Despite the high percentage of students who indicated being engaged in reflective practices, the association between reflective practices and transformative learning is not significant, $\chi^2(3) = 3.04$, $p = .385$ (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15 Test of Significance Reflective Practices

Chi-Square Tests of Significance Reflective Practices

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.046[a]	3	.385
N of Valid Cases	38		

a. 5 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .32.

Twenty-three of the 38 respondents (60.5%) indicated they had experienced a disorienting dilemma during the time they were in the degree program. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma is a key factor in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000). Table 4.16 indicates the type and frequency of disorienting dilemma reported by the respondents and the length of time in the program.

Table 4.16 Length of Time and Disorienting Dilemma

Frequencies Length of Time and Disorienting Dilemma

		Disorienting Dilemma							
		None of the above	Birth / adoption of a child	Move	Death of a loved one	Change of job	Loss of job	Other	Total
Length of Time in Program Months	0 - 6	5	0	2	0	0	0	1	8
	7 - 12	6	1	0	3	2	1	1	14
	13 - 24	3	3	1	3	1	0	1	12
	25 or more	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	4
Total		15	4	6	6	3	1	3	38

Given that the PT0 group cannot be included in the analysis with PT groups 1, 2, and 3 as to whether individuals experienced transformative learning, PT0 was assessed on whether students experienced a disorienting dilemma since this experience is a key component of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000). Although 60.5% of the students in group PT0 indicated having experienced a disorienting dilemma while in the degree program, the association between a disorienting dilemma and the incidence of transformative learning for group PT0 is not statistically significant, $\chi^2(18) = 24.46$, $p = .140$ (Table 4.17).

Table 4.17 Test of Significance Disorienting Dilemma and Length of Time in Program

Chi-Square Tests of Significance Length of Time and Disorienting Dilemma

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.466[a]	18	.140
N of Valid Cases	38		

a. 27 cells (96.4%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .11.

Research Question Two

Learning Activities

Research question two sought to understand whether students' participation in particular learning activities predicts the outcome of transformative learning. The Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997, 2009) was used to determine whether a relationship exists between students experiencing transformative learning and two categories of learning activities. The impact of learning activities was initially assessed for students who are categorized as PT3 since these respondents indicated they experienced transformative learning as part of their educational experience. Students who are categorized as PT2 or did not indicate experiencing transformative learning (PT1) were not intended to be included in this portion of the analysis. However, some PT2 respondents indicated that learning activities had an impact on the experience of

transformative learning. Therefore, the association between the impact of learning activities will be reported for both PT3 and PT2. King (2009) devised two major categories for learning activities; support, as captured in survey question five and classroom assignments, as captured in survey question seven.

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether students from any of the three PT groups reported Person Support as a factor in the experience of transformative learning. The frequencies for Person Support are reported in Table 4.18. Among the three groups, 26.8% students indicated that they experienced Person Support as part of their program.

Table 4.18 Person Support Responses

Frequencies PT Group and Person Support Report

		Person Support			
		Count	No	Yes	Total
PT Group	PT1	29	0	0	29
	PT2	1	5	6	12
	PT3	11	25	20	56
Total		41	30	26	97

Despite the low percentage of respondents indicating that Person Support was a part of their program experience, the association between Person Support and the incidence of transformative learning is statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 57.58$, $p < .001$ (Table 4.19). Experiencing Person Support is a predictor of transformative learning and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4.19 Tests for Significance Person Support

Chi-Square Tests for Significance Person Support

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	57.582[a]	4	< .001
N of Valid Cases	97		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.22.

A chi-square analysis was conducted to determine whether students from any of the three PT groups reported Class Activity as a factor in the experience of transformative learning. Table 4.20 describes the association between Class Activity and the incidence of transformative learning. A total of 49 students (50.5%) indicated Class Activity had an impact on the incidence of transformative learning.

Table 4.20 Class Activity Responses

Frequencies PT Group and Class Activity

		Class Activity			
		Count	No	Yes	Total
PT Group	PT1	29	0	0	29
	PT2	2	1	9	12
	PT3	11	5	40	56
Total		42	6	49	97

The association is statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 54.22$, $p < .001$ (Table 4.21). Participation in class activities does predict the incidence of transformative learning and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4.21 Tests for Significance Class Activity

Chi-Square Tests for Significance Class Activity

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	54.223[a]	4	< .001
N of Valid Cases	97		

a. 3 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .74.

Research Question Three

Research question three was designed to determine whether the incidence of transformative learning varied based on age. Age responses were separated into six categories and responses were reported for students who indicated they experienced transformative learning

(PT3 and PT2) and students who reported they did not experience transformative learning (PT1 and PT0). Table 4.22 describes the number of responses for all PT groups and age category.

Table 4.22 Age Category Responses

		Age Categories						
		21 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 - 59	60 or Older	Blank	Total
PT Group	PT0	11	12	9	4	2	0	38
	PT1	1	7	13	3	3	2	29
	PT2	4	2	4	0	0	2	12
	PT3	13	12	13	5	1	12	56
Total		29	33	39	12	6	16	135

When evaluating the association between age and the incidence of transformative learning, the association is statistically significant, $\chi^2(15) = 25.82$, $p = .040$, and the null hypothesis is rejected (Table 4.23).

Table 4.23 Test of Significance Age Category

Chi-Square Tests for Significance Age

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.826[a]	15	.040
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 14 cells (58.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .53.

Research Question Four

Research question four asked whether the incidence of transformative learning varied based on gender. This is consistent with the research conducted by King (1997) and several research studies on transformative learning (Brock, 2007; Caruana, 2011; Kumi-Yeboah, 2012; Schwartz, 2013). The response options for this question were Female, Male, or Blank / Preference Not Listed. The percentages were 61.5% female; 26.7% male; and 11.9% were left blank or their preference was not listed. Among students who indicated they had experienced

transformative learning, females represented 52.9% of this group; males represented 26.4% of this group; and students who left this field blank represented 20.5% of this group (Table 4.24).

Table 4.24 Gender Responses

PT Group and Gender Frequencies

		Gender			
Count		Female	Male	Blank / Preference not list	Total
PT Group	PT0	28	10	0	38
	PT1	19	8	2	29
	PT2	7	3	2	12
	PT3	29	15	12	56
Total		83	36	16	135

When evaluating the association between gender and the incidence of transformative learning, the association is not statically significant, $\chi^2(6) = 11.56$, $p = .072$ (Table 4.25). Gender does not predict the incidence of transformative learning and failed to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 4.25 Tests for Significance Gender

Chi-Square Tests for Significance PT Group and Gender

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.569[a]	6	.072
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 4 cells (33.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.42.

Research Question Five

Length of Time in Program

A recommended demographic measure (King, 1997) is length of time in the degree program. Research question five measured whether the occurrence of transformative learning varied based on the length of time, in months, students had spent in the degree completion

program. This is in keeping with King's (2009) recommendation that "…objectives and evaluations of perspective transformation can be best examined over the span of several courses, because time is an important element in identifying perspective transformation" (p. 34). Length of time in program captures approximately how many months the student has been participating in the program, based on established categories. As part of the demographic data, "This information allows adult educators to see whether the results of the study vary with different groups of people or different conditions" (King, 2009, p. 19).

Responses were received from 135 survey participants. The number of responses for each group is displayed in Table 4.26. Table 4.27 describes the length of time categories for each PT Group.

Table 4.26 Length of Time Responses

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	PT0	38	28.1
	PT1	29	21.5
	PT2	12	8.9
	PT3	56	41.5
	Total	135	100.0

Table 4.27 Length of Time Categories

Frequencies PT Group and Length of Time Categories

		Length of Time					
		0 -6 Months	7 - 12 Months	13 - 24 Months	25 Months or More	Blank	Total
PT Group	PT0	8	14	12	4	0	38
	PT1	10	9	9	0	1	29
	PT2	4	1	0	5	2	12
	PT3	8	14	14	7	13	56
Total		30	38	35	16	16	135

When examining length of time in program and PT group, the chi-square tests for significance (Table 4.28) indicated the association between length of time in the program and the incidence of transformative learning is statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 36.18$, $p < .001$. Therefore, length of time in the program may be considered a predictor of the incidence of transformative learning the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4.28 Tests of Significance Length of Time

Chi-Square Tests of Significance Length of Time

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	36.186[a]	12	< .001
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 9 cells (45.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.42.

To ensure accuracy, length of time in program was also assessed via the chi-square tests for significance (Table 4.29) for responses to research question two. The results between length of time in the program and students indicating they experienced transformative learning is statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 20.52$, $p < .001$.

Table 4.29 Response to Research Question Two and Length of Time in Program

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.528[a]	4	< .001
N of Valid Cases	135		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.94.

Summary

This chapter presented a summary of the results for data collected for five research questions concerning the incidence of transformative learning among adult students participating in an on ground, cohort-based, degree completion program. First, demographic data was

reported to include age, gender, and length of time in the degree program. Next, research question one was presented indicating whether students participating in an adult degree completion program experienced transformative learning. It was determined students do experience transformative learning.

Research question two attempted to determine whether the incidence of transformative learning could be predicted by participation in certain learning activities, defined as person support and class assignments. Results for person support are statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 57.58$, $p < .001$, and for classroom activities, $\chi^2(4) = 54.22$, $p < .001$. Participation in both support and classroom activities predicted the incidence of transformative learning for the students in this survey.

Research question three asked whether the incidence of transformative learning varied based on age. According to survey results, age was a factor in the incidence of experiencing transformative learning. Results were statistically significant, $\chi^2(15) = 25.82$, $p = .040$. Research question four sought to discover whether the incidence of transformative learning varied by gender. It was determined that gender did not play a role in determining whether students experienced transformative learning. The results were not statistically significant, $\chi^2(6) = 11.56$, $p = .072$. Finally, research question five asked whether the incidence of transformative learning varied based on length of time in the program. Length of time in the program did have an impact on whether students in this survey experienced transformative learning. The results were statistically significant, $\chi^2(12) = 36.18$, $p < .001$.

Overall, results from the survey questions offered mixed results as to whether students experience transformative learning based on the variable being measured. In chapter five the

results will be discussed in relation to the literature and recommendations for further research will be presented.

CHAPTER 5 - Summary and Conclusions

In Chapter Four, the results of the research survey were analyzed and reported. Chapter Five contains a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, implications for practice among adult educators in degree completion programs, and recommendations for further research. A closing statement will summarize the overall objective of what was attempted in this research.

Summary of the Study

There has been tremendous growth in adult, degree-completion programs. Higher education enrollment trends continue to reflect an increasing adult population, comprising 40% of all postsecondary students (Snyder & Dillow, 2013). In an effort to meet rising demand and capitalize on the opportunity to provide adult-specific programs, schools are focusing more on the administrative benefits and the highly structured format of degree completion programs and diminishing the opportunity for adults to learn and grow beyond course content (Johnson-Bailey, 2015).

The purpose of this study, utilizing King's (2009) Learning Activities Survey (LAS), was to determine if adult students in cohort-based, degree completion programs experienced transformative learning and whether it can be associated with learning activities. The study was undertaken to continue the research into the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978, 2000). Since Mezirow (1978) articulated the theory of transformative learning, it has become one of the most examined adult learning theories of the last 25 years (Cheney, 2010; E.W. Taylor, 2007).

Demographic data of age, gender, and length of time in program, were included as independent variables. Combined with learning activities, researching these concepts were in

keeping with the literature on transformative learning and the recommendation from the survey author (King, 1997, 2009) that demographic data and learning activities may be examined to determine whether the independent variables impacted the incidence of transformative learning. The questions that guided this study were:

RQ1. Did adults participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs at faith-based institutions experience transformative learning as outlined by the LAS (King, 2009)?

RQ2. Did participation in learning activities predict the incidence of transformative learning?

RQ3. Did the incidence of transformative learning vary based on age?

RQ4. Did the incidence of transformative learning vary based on gender?

RQ5. Did the incidence of transformative learning vary based on length of time in the degree program?

Discussion of Findings

In this ex-post facto study, quantitative research was conducted among adult, degree completion program students participating in on ground, cohort-based programs. Survey participants ultimately were derived from faith-based institutions without regard for geographic location. Survey participation requests were sent via email to an administrative point-of-contact at each institution and the survey invitation was then forwarded to students, at which point students elected to participate or opt out without any further contact from the surveyor. For respondents who elected to participate and for those who opted out, no identifying information was collected. Surveys were submitted by 171 individuals; one respondent opted out. Of the remaining 170, 35 surveys were incomplete and discarded, leaving 135 valid surveys (*n = 135*).

Research Question One

Research question one asked, "Do adults participating in cohort-based, degree completion programs at faith-based institutions experience transformative learning as outlined by the [Learning Activities Survey] (LAS) (King, 2009)?" The question was supported by literature that states transformative learning is a growing theory in adult education (Taylor & Cranton, 2013). In an effort to meet rising demand and capitalize on the opportunity to provide adult-specific programs, schools are focusing more on the administrative benefits and the highly structured format of degree completion programs and diminishing the opportunity for adults to learn and grow beyond course content (Johnson-Bailey, 2015). Survey results indicated that students involved in this research study believed they experienced transformative learning while participating in a degree completion program.

Transformative learning was selected to be measured due in part to the growth in adult degree completion programs and in part to Mezirow's (1981) argument that transformative learning is a uniquely adult learning domain and, for adult learning to be effective, it must address needs of adults in relation to transformative learning. Mezirow's (1981) presentation of group learning is the link to employing cohorts to facilitate the transformative learning process. The cohort model is a common feature of adult degree completion programs (Imel, 2002; Maher, 2005; Spaid & Duff, 2009). In a cohort, classmates are known to one another as each class begins, eliminating the need to learn new names and faces for each class (Spaid & Duff, 2009). Therefore, collaboration is more likely to take place, providing a supportive learning environment (Spaid & Duff, 2009). Cohorts often become sources of support and encouragement as students learn to work together (Imel, 2002), and provide "…clear structuring and course sequencing, a supportive peer group, and increased contact with instructors" (Scribner & Donaldson, 2001, pp. 605-606).

The LAS (King, 1997, 2009) was designed to identify three groups from among respondents: Students who experienced transformative learning as part of the educational experience; students who experienced transformative learning in a way not directly related to the educational experience; and students who did not experience transformative learning. Combined, there were 97 students among the three groups. Results indicated that 57.7% of the students believe they experienced transformative learning. It was expected that 36% of students would report experiencing transformative learning. Positive survey results were nearly 63% higher than anticipated. Specific independent variables were examined in the balance of the research to gain insight into the high level of positive results.

What is unclear is to what factors transformative learning should be attributed for the students in this research study. One aspect that will be discussed in research question two is the impact of learning activities on the incidence of transformative learning. However, other factors that may have an impact on transformative learning were not examined in this study. They include content and teaching style (Fetherston & Kelly, 2007) and the impact of cohort relationships outside the course structure (Reynolds & Hebert, 1998).

Despite the large percentage of students who indicated having experienced transformative learning, questions remain about the permanence of the experience and, therefore, whether transformation actually occurred. A criticism of transformative learning theory is that it often refers to any sort of learning for the student (Hoggan, 2016). Hoggan recommends that depth, breadth, and the relative stability of learning outcomes should be considered when evaluating for transformative learning. "Depth refers to the impact of change…Breadth refers to the number of contexts in which change is manifest…The third criterion is relative stability. The very concept of transformation implies that a permanent change has occurred" (Hoggan, 2016, p. 71). If the

outcome of transformative learning is to assist students in evaluating held beliefs and, if those beliefs prove no longer adequate, to change them (Christie et al., 2015) perhaps any evaluation of transformative learning should include a comprehensive assessment of beliefs prior to and immediately after the educational experience. It may be helpful to understand when the student became aware that they were experiencing transformative learning. While research question five examined how long the student had been in the program, it did not address at what point in the program the student became aware of experiencing transformative learning.

Survey question two asked whether students believed they experienced a time when they realized their values, beliefs, opinions, or expectations had change while participating in the degree completion program. The wording in research question two may be too broad to truly assess whether transformative learning has occurred, however, combined with responses to research question one, do point toward an experience of transformative learning. Students were given the option in research question three (an open-ended text question) to describe what happened to prompt the response to research question two. Research question three is not included in the analysis, however, it is being used here to help gain insight to the area in which students believed they changed.

Text question responses were evaluated for themes (Creswell, 2003) to determine more closely how students may have experienced change. Among the 55 students who responded to research question three, six themes / areas of impact emerged:

- faith (14 responses);
- a challenge or dilemma (three);
- awareness / perspective (22);
- academic growth (six);

- self-esteem (eight), and;
- leadership skills (two).

While the largest number of respondents indicated an enhanced awareness or increased perspective, the responses did not indicate to what extent, if any, behavioral changes were made.

A fourth, unexpected group, emerged from the survey results. There were 38 students who claimed to *not* have experienced transformative learning, however, each respondent completed the survey and indicated having experienced *aspects* of transformative learning. These students were included in the results for research questions three, four, and five and are discussed separately in this chapter.

However, given the self-reporting nature of this study, it is conceivable that while students in PT0 reported not having experienced transformative learning, it may be possible that they did experience transformative learning and failed to understand the definition as described in question two of the survey. This group will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Research Question Two

Research question two sought to understand whether students' participation in particular learning activities predicted the outcome of transformative learning. Ellis (2012) found that activities had an influence on those reporting having experienced transformative learning, as did Caruana (2011). In particular, Caruana (2011) found activities where students felt supported and actively engaged were especially impactful. Kumi-Yeboah (2012) and Brock (2007) each reported that learning activities supported the occurrence of transformative learning. Many researchers (e.g., Brock, 2007, Caruana, 2011, Ellis, 2012, King, 1997, Kumi-Yeboah, 2012, and Schwartz, 2013) included assessment of the role of learning activities in transformative learning.

King (2009) formulated two learning categories as part of the LAS; person support and class activities. Sub-categories that inform classroom activities include "…critical thinking assignments, class discussion, student self-assessment, discovery of one's voice, and miscellaneous learning activities" (pp. 16-17). Item 4 of the survey "facilitate[s] examination of the contribution that the learning activities have in transformative learning experiences" (p. 17). King (2009) defines person support to include teacher; advisor; student; classmates; and other persons (p. 17). Based on previous research results, it was expected that participation in learning activities would predict the incidence of transformative learning.

First, concerning person support; despite the low percentage of respondents who indicated that person support was a part of their program experience (26.8%), the association between person support and the incidence of transformative learning was statistically significant and experiencing person support was a predictor of transformative learning. This outcome is consistent with literature explaining the benefits of the cohort model. Among them are that classmates are known to each other as each class begins, eliminating the need to learn new names and faces for each class (Spaid & Duff, 2009). Additionally, the stability and continuity provided via a cohort foster collaborative relationships. The study by Spaid and Duff (2009) revealed evidence of student cohesiveness that supported growth, "Each cohort member works collectively and collaboratively toward improving the learning experiences of all members" (p. 105).

For class activities, 50.5% of respondents indicated that class activities played a role in the incidence of transformative learning. The statistical analysis indicated that this was a significant factor in predicting the incidence of transformative learning. King (2009) states that classroom activities may be broken down into five sub-categories. They are:

- critical thinking assignments;
- class discussions;
- student self-assessments;
- discovery of one's voice; and
- miscellaneous learning activities.

While not analyzed individually in this research study, classroom activities as defined by King (2009) are components that may facilitate the incidence of transformative learning. Transformative learning is considered a unique adult theory of learning with communication as a key component (E.W. Taylor, 2007). King's (1997) literature review showed that as methods for bringing transformative learning into practice were examined, "…their focus has been on developing curricula that will promote transformative learning" (p. 24).

What is unknown about the respondents is whether the concept of a disorienting dilemma was intentionally introduced through any of the learning activities. While learning activities are considered predictors of the incidence of transformative learning in this research study, "…the critical thinking step is more likely where a student has had a disorienting dilemma or disrupting event" (Brock, 2015, p. 20). Of the 68 respondents who believed they experienced transformative learning, only 24 (35.2%) indicated they had experienced a disorienting dilemma while in the program.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked whether the incidence of transformative learning varied based on age. For this question, all four response groups were included (*n = 135*). Demographic data was gathered as a way to determine whether there was a relationship among the independent variables and the reported incidence of transformative learning. In the original study, King

(1997) examined six demographic characteristics, including age, marital status, race, sex, education, and major, with length of time in education being measured in semesters in keeping with the traditional nature of student programs. Additional studies by Caruana (2011); Kumi-Yeboah (2012); Schwartz (2013); and Wansick (2007); included age as a factor in their research studies.

Age responses were examined to determine whether the incidence of transformative learning varied based on age. It was discovered that age is a significant factor in the incidence of transformative learning. A closer examination of the age data indicated 48 (70.5%) of respondents who reported experiencing transformative learning fell within a range of age 21 – 49. For all respondents, 74.8% fell within this age range. In fact, 45.7% of all students were in the 21 – 39 age range. This research study did not consider any relationship between age and life experience.

The age range of students surveyed in this study was consistent with the percentage growth in adult students participating in higher education in general. Educational statistics (Hussar & Bailey, 2018) show that between 2001 and 2015, enrollment for students aged 25 – 34 increased by 35% while enrollment for students aged 35 and over increased by only 13%. As a result, this factor may not be a valid one for further consideration. In addition, this study did not capture any data on the employment status of students or individual qualifications of the course instructors (adjunct versus university employee; subject matter expert). Variability among these factors may play a role in whether students experience transformative learning.

Research Question Four

Research question four requested gender data from respondents and was utilized to determine whether the incidence of transformational learning varied based on gender. This

measure was included based on a recommendation from King (1997, 2009). Several studies (Brock, 2007; Caruana, 2011; Kumi-Yeboah, 2012; Schwartz, 2013) were cited as ones that included gender as a demographic measure.

In this research study, female respondents outnumbered males by a ratio of better than two-to-one; 61.5% to 26.7%, with 11.9% left blank or preference not list. Despite the disparity in reported gender, it was demonstrated that gender is not a statistically significant factor in determining whether students experience transformative learning. In an attempt to understand further whether gender played a role in the experience of transformative learning, another factor was considered. That is whether these students reported experiencing a disorienting dilemma. Of the 68 respondents who indicated experiencing transformative learning, 36 were female (52.9%), 18 were male (26.4%), and 14 did not provide a response (20.5%). Among these students, only 24 reported experiencing a disorienting dilemma, or 35.2%. This figure further refined to 15 female and nine male students. This explanation does not provide a direct correlation between gender and the experience of transformative learning. The low response to whether students experienced a disorienting dilemma may help explain why the incidence of transformative learning did not vary based on gender in this research study.

Research Question Five

Length of time in the program was a recommended measure (King, 1997) and was included in other research studies (Brock, 2007; King, 1997; Wansick, 2007). As students spend more time together and advance through the program content, it is logical that perspectives may change and the opportunity for transformative learning would increase (King, 2009). King (2009) acknowledged that, "objectives and evaluations of transformative learning can be best examined over the span of several courses" (p. 34). This is consistent with the concept that

transformation may occur due to a disorienting dilemma – a trigger event – or as a result of an accumulation of experiences that combine to foster transformative learning (Mezirow, 2009).

The incidence of transformative learning did vary based on length of time in the program. It should be noted that the distribution of students among the length of time categories does not show any particular point in the program at which the incidence of transformative learning might be attributed. Cumulative data for PT3 and PT2 groups is displayed in Figure 5.1.

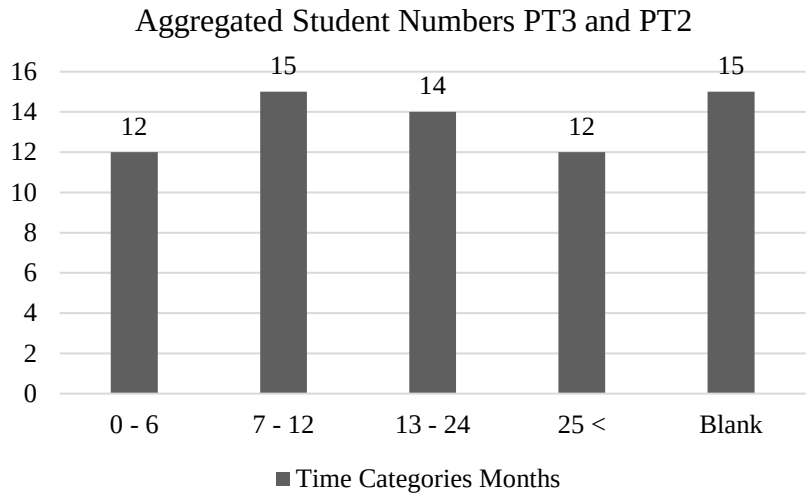
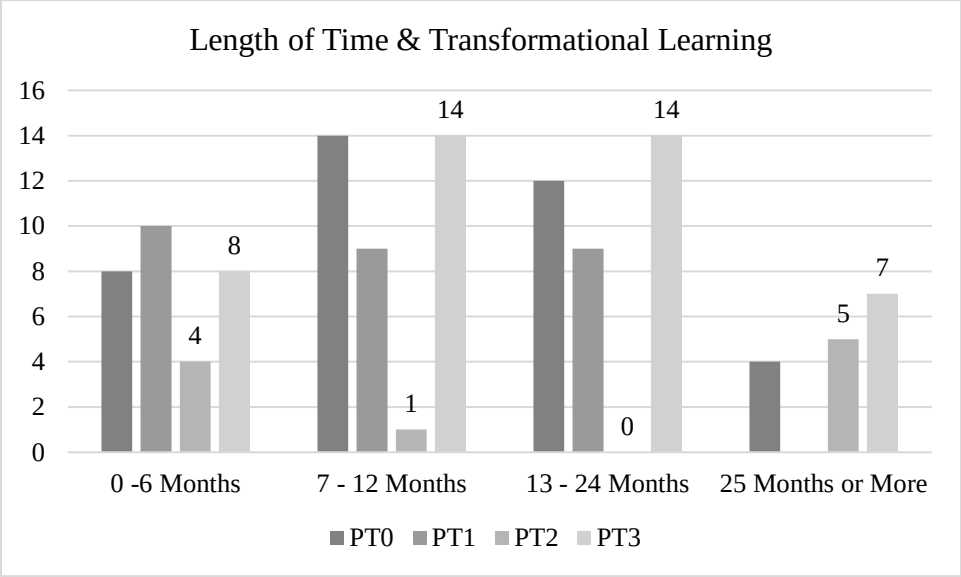


Figure 5-1 Aggregated Student Numbers by Length of Time Categories

It is unknown, then, at what point in the program students became aware they were experiencing transformative learning. The distribution of students who indicated they experienced transformative learning and experienced a disorienting dilemma is fairly even among the length-of-time categories (Table 5.1, in bold text). Examining Length of Time further, Figure 5.2 displays all four PT groups and the length of time in program.

Figure 5-2 Length of Time and PT Group



The two groups that expressed having experienced transformative learning show different profiles for Length of Time in Program. This information only reports how long they had been in the program at the time of the survey, not when they became aware of any transformation. The PT2 group respondents, which indicted they believed they had experienced transformative learning outside of the program, are fairly evenly divided between the two extreme categories (0 – 6 months and 25 months or more). For the PT3 group, response numbers fell into a bell-type curve, with the greatest number of respondents falling into the two middle categories (7 – 12 and 13 – 24 months).

Based on these results, more research would be required to understand where in the program students became aware that they believed they were experiencing transformative learning. Further research might also indicate more clearly when the respondents experienced a disorienting dilemma. It is possible the disorienting dilemma was the factor that caused students to seek out a degree. Knowing these additional factors would enable an examination of the

content being taught and the qualifications of the instructor(s) in facilitating a transformative learning experience.

Table 5.1 Disorienting Dilemma and Length of Time

			Blank	No	**Yes**	Total
Survey Question Two: Yes	Length of Time	0 -6 Months	0	7	**5**	12
		7 - 12 Months	0	9	**6**	15
		13 - 24 Months	0	9	**5**	14
		25 Months or More	0	5	**7**	12
		Blank	13	1	**1**	15
	Total		13	31	**24**	68

New Group Identified

It was expected that survey results would separate into three categories as outlined in Chapter Three; PT3, PT2, and PT1. After sorting, 38 respondents with similar profiles, but not fitting into one of the anticipated categories, emerged and were assigned a new group designation: PT0. These individuals responded to survey question one and selected a statement that equates to a stage of transformative learning (King, 2009; Mezirow, 2000), yet they responded to survey question two negatively, indicating they did not believe they had experienced a time when they realized their values, beliefs, opinions, or expectations had changed while in the program. By selecting a phase of transformative learning in survey question one, the respondents were able to continue through most of the survey. As a result, all 38 respondents completed the survey and characterized themselves as those who engage in reflection. Responses to survey questions 11 and 12 indicated respondents utilized reflective practices when considering past behavior as well as the meaning of their studies, which are behaviors indicative of the critical reflection aspect of transformative learning (Brown, 2005; King, 2009; Mezirow, 2003). Additionally, 23 students from this group (60.5%) indicated they

had experienced a disorienting dilemma during the time they were in the program. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma is a key factor in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1997, 2000).

Since these students did not respond favorably to survey question two, it is not possible to conduct analyses on whether they believe they experienced transformative learning combined with the aspects of disorienting dilemma, length of time in program, or class activities. It is possible these students experienced transformative learning and did not relate the experience to survey question two. Since these students selected at least one phase of transformative learning in research question one, it could be argued this is the case. It should be noted that a group fitting this profile was not found in any other research studies. For this study, speculation on why these students participated in transformative behaviors yet did not perceive themselves as having experienced transformative learning centers on the faith-based nature of the institutions.

A concern raised in this research study was that within adult, degree completion programs, the opportunity for communicative learning, discourse and critical reflection are diminished. Transformative learning includes components inherent in and critical to adult learning, including "…experiential learning, critical self-reflection, and rational discourse that can be stimulated by people, events, or changes in a context that challenges the learner's basic assumptions of the world" (Brown, 2005, p. 23). It may be that these 38 students participated in reflective practices and were thoughtful about their beliefs but were never challenged to reconsider their preconceived ideas. The challenge process often must be facilitated. "Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 1). For students committed to a particular point of view, they may argue that others should see the world from their perspective (Christie et al., 2015). As a result, changing

perspectives becomes difficult. "It is easier and safer to maintain habits of mind than to change" (Cranton, 2002, p. 65).

One way to promote critical reflection is to have a skilled facilitator ask questions and challenge beliefs in a safe environment (Mezirow, 1990). Instead of being challenged, it may be that students found their beliefs affirmed and therefore did not experience transformative learning. As transformative learners utilize critical reflection to move toward a revised point of view, habits of mind may also be transformed. The evidence is that in these cases, habits of mind were not transformed. Data indicating whether adult students enrolled in the survey institutions due to shared beliefs is not available.

All of these students were part of cohort groups. Cohorts are convenient, facilitate learning, and support collaboration, setting the groundwork for discourse and reflection (Boyd, 1990; Brooks, 1998; Lawrence, 1997; Nesbit, 2001). However, cohorts do not form without guidance and success of the cohort is aided by being intentional about creating a structure that fosters learning and development (Imel, 2002). If transformative opportunities were not facilitated, then there are implications for the selection and preparation of faculty. For both faculty and students, it is possible they already shared beliefs and, therefore, participated in the program of an institution that valued and promoted those beliefs. However, available data indicates only 25% of undergraduate enrollment for the institutions in this study was of the sponsoring denomination (Porter, 2019). Without specific enrollment data for the adult students in the programs utilized in this study, this premise is not supported by fact.

Limitations

This research study utilized an ex post facto method. The study had several limitations based on this non-experimental design, the type of programs examined, and the student population surveyed for this study. Limitations included:

1. The program must enroll adult students and require some college credit as a condition of admission. This assumption limits generalization by excluding programs that admit adult students with no previous college credit.
2. The programs to be examined in this study utilize a cohort model of instruction. Results from this study cannot be generalized to adult programs that utilize a course-based model of instruction or a traditional academic structure.
3. The survey relies on self-reported data and the participants' ability to accurately reflect on their learning experience. Therefore, the results are limited by the accuracy and truthfulness of the participants' responses.
4. This study focuses on adults enrolled in degree-completion programs and, therefore, the results are not generalizable to adult students in other types of programs.
5. Schools listed for contact are not-for profit, faith-based private colleges or universities and results may not correspond to public institutions.
6. Generalizability was also limited by sample size.

Another limitation is the use of chi-square analysis for three variables (age, gender, length of time in program) as opposed to a regression analysis. Not utilizing regression analysis potentially increases the chance of a type I error. However, it was determined to utilize chi-square analysis for the following reasons:

- The literature supports analyzing the variables independently, and
- It provides the means to run an analysis independently for each PT group.

Implications for Practice

This quantitative study sought to understand the transformative learning experience within the context of the growth in adult degree completion programs. Based on the results, analysis, and discussion of the research questions, there are implications for administrators of and educators in adult, degree completion programs.

Adult Motivation to Return to School

This study began with the premise that the number of adults returning to school was growing and institutions were increasing programming to accommodate this growth. However, programs were designed around convenience factors like location, schedule, and an accelerated format, and may not have incorporated transformational learning within the programs. The demand, in part, was due to a shortage of qualified workers and the need for applicants with at least a bachelor's degree to meet the demand. Data suggests the need for workers is continuing.

Market forces continue to be a factor in adult motivation to earn educational credentials. National unemployment rates are at historically low levels (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019), currently 3.5%. This figure is even lower for adults holding a bachelor's degree; for persons 25 years of age and older, the unemployment rate is 2.1%. Typically, when unemployment is low, enrollment in higher education declines (Schmidt, 2018). However, data reveals that levels of college enrollment are higher now than before the recession of 2007 – 2009 and projections are for an increase in college enrollment of 15% through 2025 (Schmidt, 2018). Employers indicate plans to increase hiring by 52% across all degree levels; 47% will be increasing hiring at the bachelor degree level (Gardner, 2019). When examining actual job

growth in new hires, 71% will be at the bachelor degree level. This represents a 10% increase from the previous year (Gardner, 2019). Additional survey data indicates 63.3% of employers rate the job market as good-to-excellent (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018).

Adults may be motivated by several factors to return to school despite the strong job market. As of 2016, only 33.4% of adults 25 years of age and older held a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). While this figure is at an historic high, it points out that the gap for adults with at least a bachelor's degree as compared to those without a bachelor's degree is still large. Additional data indicates that approximately 36 million adults (median age of 39) have some college but no degree, a prime target audience for adult degree completion programs (Shapiro, Ryu, Huie, & Liu, 2019). Job opportunities exist for students with a bachelor's degree that could drive adults to seek out degree programs.

Another potential motivating factor is financial. As noted, the unemployment rate for adults with at least a bachelor's degree is extremely low. Not surprisingly, earnings for these students provide a wage premium over a lifetime of 84% as compared to adults with only high school diplomas (Carnevale, Rose, Cheah, 2011). More recent data suggest median weekly earnings for a person with a bachelor's degree are 39% higher as compared to a holder of an associate's degree (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Finally, as was discussed in a previous chapter, by 2020 35% of all job openings will require at least a bachelor's degree (Carnevale, Smith, Strohl, 2013).

In a NACE survey (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2018) employers were asked to describe the career readiness competencies they see as vital among employees. Results indicated that critical thinking is the number one need in the workplace, followed closely

by teamwork / collaboration and global / multi-cultural fluency. Each of these competencies may be addressed through transformational learning.

Transformative Learning Versus Perspective Transformation

Hoggan (2016) identified a significant problem with transformative learning theory; "It is increasingly being used to refer to almost any instance of learning" (p. 57). This idea was supported by an analysis of transformative learning research which revealed the term "transformative learning" is used to refer to relatively minor changes (Hoggan, 2016). Hoggan believes transformative learning and perspective transformation should be distinctive aspects of adult learning. To assist in regaining this distinction, particular attention should be paid to teaching methods.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Teaching for transformation can be intentional. "Rather than being content-focused, transformational teachers help students become meta-critical participants in the learning process and well-practiced at critical thinking, goal setting, and reflection" (Fuglei, 2014). If teaching for transformation is to be an objective of adult, degree completion programs, institutions should consider the kind of knowledge that best meets this outcome, whether instrumental, communicative, or emancipatory (Habermas, 1971). Cranton (2002) defines the knowledge types as:

- instrumental; cause-and-effect, objective knowledge,
- communicative knowledge; the understanding of ourselves, others, and the social norms of the community or society in which we live, and
- emancipatory; the self-awareness that frees us from constraints and is a product of critical reflection and critical self-reflection. (p. 64)

While all three types of learning are valid, “The acquisition of emancipatory knowledge is transformative” (Cranton, 2002, p. 64).

Cranton (2002) outlined a teaching strategy for transformation that aligns with the phases of transformative learning. These strategies are designed to create a safe environment of challenge. The steps for creating this challenging and empowering learning environment are:

- Creating an Activating Event
- Articulating Assumptions
- Critical Self-Reflection
- Openness to Alternatives
- Discourse (pp. 66-69).

The last two steps are student-focused and are part of the learning process: Revision of assumptions and perspectives, and, acting on revisions (Cranton, 2002, pp. 69-70).

Each of these steps have implications for course content and learning activities. Instrumental knowledge is important for students seeking new skills to excel in the workplace. However, combining emancipatory teaching techniques with content knowledge can lead to a transformative learning experience. While these steps may facilitate the transformative learning process, ultimately it is the student who must choose to transform (Cranton, 2002).

Instructor

Faculty data for the degree completion programs utilized in this study are not available. Based on the researcher’s experience in degree completion programs as an administrator and instructor, and close familiarity with degree completion programs at several universities, it is known that the use of adjunct instructors is prevalent. According to at TIAA-CREF Institute report (Yakoboski & Foster, 2014), adjunct instructors make up 50% of higher education faculty.

"Adjuncts are often hired because of their subject matter expertise and related work experience" (Johnson, 2011, p.1). The use of adjunct instructors is often driven by administrative requirements, including cost control and institutional flexibility (Yakoboski & Foster, 2014). Research indicates learning outcomes for classes taught by adjuncts to be subpar compared to classes taught by tenured faculty (Yakoboski & Foster, 2014). Instructor preparation beyond subject matter expertise must be considered in light of the premise of this research study.

Johnson (2011) discusses the need for adjunct instructors to be familiar with adult education theories, including transformative learning. Johnson (2011) states, "When utilized as a facilitation strategy the adult learner is asked to reflect on their belief systems and then they are challenged to consider alternative views through discussions, self-assessments, and other problem-solving activities" (p. 2). As Johnson (2011) points out, however, the course syllabus is most likely provided to the instructor and there is little-to-no flexibility with content or the ability to modify or adapt learning activities. However, instructors still have an opportunity to create an environment that might be conducive to transformative learning. "Transformational teaching involves creating relationships between teachers, students, and a shared body of knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth" (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

Age and Gender

Age and gender were not factors in the incidence of transformative learning for subjects surveyed for this research study. Mezirow's (1978) original study reported on women's re-entry programs in community colleges. This study formed the basis for the theory of perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 1997). A brief, online search for transformative learning studies and gender returned results that included female subjects but not male subjects or

comparative studies. Transformative learning is an adult learning theory and while gender may play a role in how transformation occurs, it did not impact the outcome of this research study.

Assessment

The Learning Activities Survey (King, 1997, 2009) was utilized in this research study to understand whether students experienced transformative learning while participating in a degree completion program. One of the limitations of this survey was that results were self-reported and are indications of the perceptions of the respondents. As described previously, it is possible students who indicated they experienced transformative learning were actually reporting on the outcome of a specific learning activity or the overall experience of being in a degree program; a sense of progress and accomplishment. It is also possible that participants who reported experiencing aspects of transformative learning – but not transformative learning itself – actually had their beliefs affirmed.

In a journal article calling for dissemination of transformative learning within the population outside traditional education to increase its appeal, Brock (2015) suggested that one way to accomplish this objective "…is to develop and validate an instrument that measures the occurrence of transformative learning and reflects on the current state-of-the-art thinking on what it is and what precipitates it" (p. 18). Brock (2015) acknowledges the qualitative research that has occurred and the role the Learning Activities Survey played in quantitative studies. However, Brock (2015) sees a need to expand assessment efforts as a way to increase transformative learning practices outside of academic circles.

In response to confusion concerning research paradigms, Romano (2018) conducted a review of assessment tools utilized for transformative learning, including the LAS. Four tools were examined and each had a specific focus, combining qualitative and quantitative

methodologies. Despite the availability of the assessment tools, Romano (2018) determined to utilize three of the tools in order to more fully understand the individual's social environment in which reflection takes place (Romano, 2018). Gaining acceptance from survey participants and combining the results from disparate instruments is problematic.

To more fully assess the incidence of transformative learning, students may need to be surveyed at the beginning of the educational program; periodically throughout the program; and then again at the end (or at a date beyond the completion of the program). Transformative learning must result in new frames of reference and habits of mind (Mezirow, 2003). Whether this is fully possible is open to debate. As Cranton (2002) states, "We cannot teach transformation. We often cannot even identify how or why it happens. But we can teach s though the possibility always exists and that a student will have a transformational experience" (pp. 70-71).

Recommendations for Further Research

This quantitative study focused on a specific group of students who were engaged in a growing area of adult education. The results of the research study provided partial affirmation of the incidence of transformative learning for students participating in a degree completion program, and raised questions about the depth of the experience and the level of knowledge gained in the survey. A data point that was not collected from the subjects in this survey was why they returned to school to complete a bachelor's degree. Literature provides general insights as to why adults return to college, and the economic data implies additional reasons for earning a bachelor's degree. For administrators to create effective programs, it is recommended that student who express interest in or apply to a degree completion program be surveyed as to

why they are taking this step. Transformative learning is a desired outcome of adult education, yet students may not be driven by this same desire.

Further research is recommended concerning the depth of change in frames of reference for students participating in degree completion programs. This research study raised questions as to whether students actually experienced a perspective transformation, whether they had long-held beliefs affirmed by their experience, or if they simply learned new information that was satisfying and formed minor expansion within their frames of reference. Transformative learning strives to create permanent change – until the next disorienting dilemma – and a methodology for understanding the level of change within each student should be designed and tested within this audience. A method of assessment that captures data at the beginning of the program, periodically throughout the program, and then again at the end of the program would provide more comprehensive data. Ideally, surveying students at some point after completing the degree program would offer insight into the durability of the transformative learning experience.

This further research is recommended in light of the new group that was identified in this study. While a disorienting dilemma is considered a pre-cursor event to transformative learning, it may be participation in certain learning activities was enough of an activating event for students to begin to challenge their own beliefs and experience one or more phases of transformative learning.

In this research study, it was found that the incidence of transformative learning did not vary based on age or gender. This seems counter-intuitive and it is recommended that more research be conducted to include phases of adult development and a closer examination of any

disorienting dilemmas identified by survey subjects. This information could be compared against age and gender data to see if any patterns emerge.

As a result of these recommendations, the work for designing more comprehensive survey instruments should continue within the discipline of adult education. Transformative learning has expanded into a broad theory of adult learning and is being applied to and measured within a vast array of contexts, from adult students to adult educators and within professional practices like nursing and sociology.

It is recommended that program administrators design curriculum that blends instrumental and communicative / emancipatory learning. Students earn a degree to gain knowledge and skills necessary to meet personal and career objectives. However, it is possible to incorporate learning activities that convey content in the context of critical reflection and critical discourse so that students expand their frames of reference / worldview. This blend of learning may make students more employable from a skills perspective and increase their ability to operate in diverse work settings with a diverse group of cohorts.

Blending learning methods has implications for faculty hiring and qualifications. Accelerated programs utilize subject matter experts for administrative benefits and to ensure current knowledge in the subject. Program administrators should consider requiring a preparatory course for all program instructors that includes adult learning theory and techniques for facilitating a transformative learning environment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand whether adult students in cohort-based, degree completion programs experienced transformative learning and whether that transformation is associated with learning activities. Results of the survey indicated learning

activities were significant for students reporting having experienced transformative learning. The results indicated the reported incidence of transformative learning did not vary based on age or gender. In addition, while reported transformative learning did vary based on length of time in the program, it was unknown when in the program students became aware of any transformation.

In conducting this research study, the researcher gained a deeper knowledge of the theory of perspective transformation and the concept of transformative learning. The concept of transformation and the historic premise of education – to create better citizens – is important to the researcher and these concepts were supported by literature and other research conducted within the field of adult education. A conflict seems to arise in the realm of degree completion programs as many institutions take advantage of the growing market to increase enrollment and income. During the research process, it was discovered that institutions are moving away from the cohort model of instruction and that many programs are transitioning to online delivery and away from face-to-face interaction. While it is possible to facilitate transformational learning in an online setting, it becomes more difficult to evaluate participation, and therefore, the effectiveness of the process.

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Appendix A - **Learning Activities Survey**

King, K. P. (2009). *The handbook of the evolving research of transformative learning based on the Learning Activities Survey*. IAP.

QA **Introduction** You are being asked to participate in research that will assist adult educators and program directors in assessing the quality of adult degree completion programs. The overall goal is to improve the adult learner experience and to assist adults in achieving their educational objectives.

Purpose This survey helps us learn about the experiences of adult learners. As adults participate in education, the potential for individual growth exists. Only with your help can we learn more about this experience. This survey takes just a few minutes to complete and your responses will remain anonymous. In addition, the data will remain confidential. Thank you for helping with this important research. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Procedures This survey consists of a blend of multiple choice and yes / no questions. There are also a couple of opportunities for you to expand or explain your responses. Since all surveys are anonymous, the text responses will be used only to gain greater understanding of the numbered responses. No answers may be linked back to respondents.

Respond to each question and continue through the survey at our own pace. Some responses will cause the survey to skip questions in order for the logic to be maintained. You may move forward or backward until you are satisfied that you have responded in a way that accurately reflects your ideas and opinions. The survey will remain open for approximately one week.

Participation and Risks There are no risks associated with completing this survey. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw or refuse participation at any time without jeopardy to your academic status, GPA, or standing with the university.

Benefits Participants may benefit by spending a few moments thinking about their learning experience in a way that may enrich the overall experience. Adult educators will gain greater insight into providing effective, satisfying, adult programs.

Confidentiality Surveys cannot be linked to student names. All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed and no one other than the primary investigator and the major professor will have access to results. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator. No one will know you participated in the survey unless you choose to provide your name as described in the next paragraph.

Compensation All participants may elect to submit their name for a drawing of one of five VISA® gift cards. The card will be awarded via random drawing among all survey participants who choose to be included. If you wish to be a part of the drawing, please submit your contact information at the end of this survey. The information will ONLY be delivered to the primary researcher and cannot be linked to individual responses.

Questions If you have questions about any aspect of this survey, click the button to contact the researcher. If you wish to receive a reply from the researcher, please include an email address. Should you choose to complete the survey, your responses will remain anonymous. kevinm@ksu.edu

QB I have read and understand the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q1 Thinking about your educational experiences at this institution, check all statements that apply. Please review the list before responding.

- ❑ A. I had an experience that caused me to question the way I normally act.
- ❑ B. I had an experience that caused me to question my ideas about social roles. (Examples of social roles include what a mother or father should do or ha an adult child should act.)
- ❑ C. As I questioned my ideas, I realized I no longer agreed with my previous beliefs or role expectations.
- ❑ D. Or, instead, as I questioned my ideas, I realized I still agreed with my beliefs or role expectations.
- ❑ E. I realized that other people also questioned their beliefs.
- ❑ F. I thought about acting in a different way from my usual beliefs and roles.
- ❑ G. I felt uncomfortable with traditional social expectations.
- ❑ H. I tried out new roles so that I would become more comfortable or confident in them.
- ❑ I. I tried to figure out a new way to adopt these new ways of acting.
- ❑ J. I gathered the information I needed to adopt these new ways of acting.
- ❑ K. I began to think about the reactions and feedback from my new behavior.
- ❑ L. I took action and adopted these new ways of acting.
- ❑ M. I do not identify with any of the statements above.

Q2 Since you have been taking courses at this institution, do you believe you have experienced a time when you realized your values, beliefs, opinions, or expectations had changed?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q3 Briefly describe what happened:

The next few questions relate to three forms of influence: Person, class assignment, or significant life change. Select all that apply.

Q4 Considering the change indicated in question 3: Was it a person who influenced the change?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q5 If "yes," was it...(check all that apply):

- ❑ Another student's support (individual)
- ❑ Your classmates' support (group)
- ❑ Your advisor's support
- ❑ A challenge from your teacher
- ❑ Your teacher's support
- ❑ Other _____

Q6 Considering the change indicated in question 3: Was it a part of a class assignment that influenced the change?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q7 If "yes," was it...(check all that apply):

- ❑ Class / group projects
- ❑ Writing about your concerns
- ❑ Personal journal
- ❑ Nontraditional structure of a course
- ❑ Internship or co-op
- ❑ Deep, concentrated thought
- ❑ Personal learning assessment (PLA)
- ❑ Verbally discussing your concerns
- ❑ Term papers / essays
- ❑ Self-evaluation in a course
- ❑ Class activity / exercise
- ❑ Lab experiences
- ❑ Personal reflection
- ❑ Assigned readings
- ❑

Other _____

Q8 Considering the change indicated in question 3: Was it a significant event/change in your life that influenced the change?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q9 If "yes," what was it? (please select all that apply)

- ❑ Marriage
- ❑ Birth / adoption of a child
- ❑ Moving
- ❑ Divorce / separation
- ❑ Death of a loved one
- ❑ Job change
- ❑ Loss of job
- ❑ Retirement
- ❑ Other _____

Q10 Thinking back to when you first realized that your views or perspective had changed, what did your being in school have to do with the experience of change?

Q11 Would you characterize yourself as one who usually thinks back over previous decisions or past behaviors?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q12 Would you say that you frequently reflect upon the meaning of your studies for yourself, from a personal perspective?

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No

Q13 Which of the following has been a part of your experience at this institution? (check all that apply)

- ❑ Another student's support (individual)
- ❑ Your classmates' support (group)
- ❑ Your advisor's support
- ❑ Class / group projects
- ❑ Writing about your concerns
- ❑ Personal journal
- ❑ Nontraditional course structure
- ❑ Internship or co-op
- ❑ Deep, concentrated thought
- ❑ Personal learning assessment
- ❑ A challenge from your teacher(s)
- ❑ Your teacher's support
- ❑ Verbally discussing your concerns
- ❑ Term papers / essays
- ❑ Self-evaluation in a course
- ❑ Class activity / exercise
- ❑ Lab experience
- ❑ Personal reflection
- ❑ Assigned readings
- ❑ Other _____

Q14 Which of the following occurred while you have been taking courses at this institution? (check all that apply)

- ❍ Marriage
- ❍ Birth / adoption of a child
- ❍ Move
- ❍ Divorce / separation
- ❍ Death of a loved one
- ❍ Change of job
- ❍ Loss of job
- ❍ Retirement
- ❍ Other _____
- ❍ None of the above

Q15 What is your gender?

- ❍ Female
- ❍ Male

Q16 How long have you been participating in this degree program?

- ❍ 0 - 3 months
- ❍ 4 - 6 months
- ❍ 7 - 9 months
- ❍ 10 - 12 months
- ❍ > 12 months

Q17 What is your race?

- ❍ White/Caucasian
- ❍ African American
- ❍ Hispanic
- ❍ Asian
- ❍ Native American
- ❍ Pacific Islander
- ❍ Other

Q18 How old are you?

- ❍ Under 21
- ❍ 21 - 24
- ❍ 25 - 29
- ❍ 30 - 39
- ❍ 40 - 49
- ❍ 50 - 59
- ❍ 60 - 69
- ❍ 70 or above

Appendix B - **Survey Institutions**

Institution	Location
Friends University	Wichita, Kansas
MidAmerica Nazarene University	Olathe, Kansas
Ottawa University	Ottawa, Kansas
Southern Nazarene University	Bethany, Oklahoma
Southwestern Christian University	Bethany, Oklahoma
Trevecca Nazarene University	Nashville, Tennessee

Appendix C - **Subject University Contact Letter**

Dear NAME:

My name is Kevin Mokhtarian. I am a doctoral student in Adult and Continuing Education at Kansas State University. My professor, Dr. Jeff Zacharakis is the principal investigator and advisor for my research.

Prior to accepting a position at Kansas State University, I was employed in the adult and professional education division at a private, liberal arts university located in the Kansas City metropolitan region. The university offers adult, degree completion programs. It was while teaching and observing students in the program that the thesis for my research took form.

I am conducting research to understand whether students experience transformative learning while participating in a cohort-based, degree completion program. The concept of transformative learning was first articulated by Jack Mezirow in 1978 and has evolved into an important theory of adult learning.

Your institution offers a cohort-based, degree completion program for adults and I would request your permission to ask your students to participate in an online survey. The survey is known as the Learning Activities Survey and is designed specifically to measure the occurrence of transformative learning in adults. Dr. Kathleen King is the originator and the survey has been validated and used extensively since its development in 1997.

It should first be noted that this survey does not measure the quality or effectiveness of a program and it does not critique the curriculum. The survey focuses on the student experience only as it relates to whether transformative learning took place.

We are requesting participation of students no matter how long they have been in the program. This range will include students just beginning their degree and those at or near completion. Twelve universities are assisting with the survey. Results will be aggregated and not grouped by

institution. Therefore, it will be impossible to track results back to any individual or any institution.

A student may elect to provide a name and contact information to be considered in a drawing for a VISA™ gift card but names cannot be linked to individual responses.

If you are willing to allow access to your students, I request that you forwarded an invitation email from me requesting their participation. No personal information form the students will be requested and surveys cannot be associated with individual students or institutions.

We believe this research will add a new perspective to the theory of transformative learning with implications for instructors and curriculum development. There is no risk to students or institutions and we appreciate your consideration and participation in this research.

Thank you.

Appendix D - **Informed Consent Form**

QA Introduction
You are being asked to participate in research that will assist adult educators and program directors in assessing the quality of adult degree completion programs. The overall goal is to improve the adult student experience and to assist adults in achieving their educational objectives.

Purpose This survey helps us learn about the experiences of adult students. As adults participate in education, the potential for individual growth exists. Only with your help can we learn more about this experience. This survey takes just a few minutes to complete and your responses will remain anonymous. In addition, the data will remain confidential. Thank you for helping with this important research. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Procedures This survey consists of a blend of multiple choice and yes / no questions. There are also a couple of opportunities for you to expand or explain your responses. Since all surveys are anonymous, the text responses will be used only to gain greater understanding of the numbered responses. No answers may be linked back to respondents.

Respond to each question and continue through the survey at our own pace. Some responses will cause the survey to skip questions in order for the logic to be maintained.

You may move forward or backward until you are satisfied that you have responded in a way that accurately reflects your ideas and opinions. The survey will remain open for approximately one week.

Participation and Risks There are no risks associated with completing this survey. Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw or refuse participation at any time without jeopardy to your academic status, GPA, or standing with the university.

Benefits Participants may benefit by spending a few moments thinking about their learning experience in a way that may enrich the overall experience. Adult educators will gain greater insight into providing effective, satisfying, adult programs.

Confidentiality Surveys cannot be linked to student names. All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting only combined results and never reporting individual ones). All questionnaires will be concealed and no one other than the primary investigator and the major professor will have access to results. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, secure database until it has been deleted by the primary investigator. No one will know you participated in the survey unless you choose to provide your name as described in the next paragraph.

Compensation All participants may elect to submit their name for a drawing of one of five VISA™ gift cards. The card will be awarded via random drawing among all survey participants who choose to be included. If you wish to be a part of the drawing, please submit your contact information at the end of this survey. The information will ONLY be delivered to the primary researcher and cannot be linked to individual responses.

Questions If you have questions about any aspect of this survey, click the button to contact the researcher. If you wish to receive a reply from the researcher, please include an email address. Should you choose to complete the survey, your responses will remain anonymous. kevinm@ksu.edu

QB I have read and understand the above consent form and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

- ❍ Yes
- ❍ No