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Creating Activating Events for Transformative Learning in a Prison Classroom

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2   Creating Activating Events for

3   Transformative Learning in a Prison Classroom

4   **Abstract**

5   In this article we interpreted, in light of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, interviews

6   with 13 educators regarding their work with marginalized adult learners in prisons in the

7   northeastern United States. Transformative learning may have been aided by the educators'

8   response to unplanned activating events, humor and respect, and assumed roles of role model,

9   and counselor. Teachers presented activating events they perceived supported resistant learners

10 to alter their meaning schemes and revise their frames of reference. Administrators of

11 educational programs for marginalized adult learners can help prison educators develop these

12 pedagogical practices. Practitioners and researchers may wish to explore humor in restricted

13 learning environments as well as the challenge mandatory prison classrooms present for the field

14 of formal adult learning and transformative learning theory.

15
16 *Key words:* transformative learning, correctional educator, adult education, activating event,
17 disorienting dilemma, critical reflection, humor
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3   **Introduction**

4   Many educators working in prison education programs seek to help alter inmates' frames

5   of reference that contribute to their crippling life prospects, while providing instruction in

6   required basic education, GED, or optional college preparation. Scholars have suggested more

7   could be understood about how transformative learning happens for marginalized adult learners

8   (Daloz, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, 2012; Merriam, 2010; Mezirow, 2004; Mottern, Davis, & Ziegler,

9   2013; Taylor, 2007), particularly in settings that are difficult to study, such as inside the walls of

10   a prison. Inmate students often bring a sense of failure from painful K-12 experiences, they and

11   their teachers are under watch; their progress does not necessarily lead to further independence;

12   their future is limited by the stigma of residing in a geographic community surrounded by walls

13   and wire; and policy makers and voters often question the funding for inmates' educational

14   programs. Adult inmate learners' experiences are not visible in much of the research about

15   formal adult learning, as they are forced to learn, and adult learning theory emerges from the

16   assumption that adults choose to learn (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2012).

17   While prison educators share the assumption that education can reduce recidivism,

18   particularly college course work, and while research has supported that hope (Cecil, Drapkin,

19   MacKenzie, & Hickman, 2000; Coley & Barton, 2006; Davis et al., 2014) educators are aware

20   their marginalized learners are likely to face challenges more extreme than many adults returning

21   to school after long gaps. Students in prison education programs may have psychological and

22   developmental problems (Kellam, 2007; Steurer, Smith, & Tracey, 2001) and they may question

23   the value of education (Kellam, 2007; LaVigne, Thomas, Vishner, Kachnowski, & Travis, 2003).

24   Prisoners' frames of reference may lead them to be distrustful of others (Muth & Kiser, 2008),

25   including teachers. At the same time, prisoners who are seeking the educational opportunities

available in a prison are in great need of reframing their understanding of their life experiences and discerning a new "line of action" (Mezirow, 1997).

Educators may be unprepared to teach in a prison environment, adding to the challenges inmate students face. The prison educators that Wright (2005) interviewed claimed they were not prepared to work in an environment they perceived as strange. Garland, Hogan, and Lambert (2012) found that prison staff such as educators experienced stress on the job resulting from lack of adequate role clarification. Disruptive behavior in the classroom by one or more prisoners can result in the teacher's difficult decision to write up that prisoner or ask assistance from a correctional officer. Additionally, supervisors may pressure educators to make sure that a certain percentage of students pass achievement tests, while the prisoners may feel they have many years to reach such a goal.

Also, while some research has suggested prison educators care for and understand inmate students (Mageehon, 2006; Schlesinger, 2005; Wright, 2004) and resist using their power to write up bad behavior (Spaulding, 2011), Garvett (2004) has suggested educators need ongoing support to learn transformative teaching methods.

As educators, they have unique opportunities to create or respond to a challenging event and be ready to be challenged themselves while inviting students to reframe their perspective. Behan (2007) suggested prison educators not let their pedagogical creativity be extinguished by the structures of the prison system. Activating events in classrooms invite new frames of reference for understanding themselves as learners as well as learning the course material (Cranton, 2002; Kovan & Dirkx, 2003; Merriam & Ntseane, 2008). Pedagogy supported by constructivist theory, for instance, has been found to help prison educators promote dialogue in the classroom in an effort to mature learners' frames of reference (Muth & Kiser, 2008).

However, little is known about what prison educators perceive facilitates transformative learning in their classroom**.** Recognizing Merriam's (2010) claim that transformative learning theory has made a turn in the last decade to focusing more on adult learning in particular settings, this study seeks to make a contribution to the field by understanding better the experience of prison educators who perceive they are contributing to the transformation of their students' frames of reference.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to discern prison educators' perceptions of inmates' initial frames of references as learners and the ways that disorienting dilemmas and activating events may have initiated changes in their sets of meanings and frames of reference, resulting in transformative learning. In addition we sought to understand if there were roles and strategies educators believed promoted such learning. This study aimed to contribute to understanding the relevance of the pedagogical assumptions of transformative learning in the distinct learning setting of a prison. Taylor and Snyder (2012) in their review of research on transformative learning theory pointed out that transformative learning is not a "one size fits all" approach. The effectiveness of transformative learning in a prison setting or other settings for marginalized learners could depend, in part, on the educators' choice of roles and teaching strategies, taking the risks perceived to be required to use transformative education methods (Muth & Kiser, 2008; Wright, 2004).

The central research question was, "What do prison educators perceive to be their role in the transformative experiences of inmates?" This study sought to determine (a) prison educators' perceptions of inmate transformation, particularly resulting from activating events, (b) prison

1 educators' beliefs regarding what facilitated a transformative learning in the lives of their

2 students, and (c) the educational roles and strategies educators employ in the classroom.

3 **Literature Review**

4   Facilitating transformative learning in the classroom by challenging students' meaning

5 schemes and frames of reference and not heavily relying on instrumental learning and packaged

6 curriculum could offer a better approach to learning (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006;

7 Mezirow, 1997). Mezirow's (2000) theory suggests that profound changes in inmate students'

8 frames of reference could occur as a result of reflective discourse about disorienting dilemmas

9 created by or taken advantage of by educators. One of Mezirow's (2000) central ideas was that

10 adult educators can help others overcome situational and emotional constraints to transformation

11 through critical thinking about their assumptions in discourse. Learners' frames of reference and

12 habits of mind can be challenged when teachers engage them in being critically reflective of their

13 sociolinquistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, philosophical, or psychological assumptions. Research

14 has frequently analyzed critical, cognitive reflection with others for its capacity to evoke

15 powerful self-reflection. More recently West (2014) speculated that when the student has few

16 psychosocial and emotional resources available due to oppression, poverty, or, in the case of this

17 study, living in a prison institution run on fear and restriction of freedom, "new kinds of

18 interdisciplinary understanding of the whole lived experience" (p.13) may be required for

19 transformative learning to occur. Understanding adult education through the lens of

20 transformative learning theory may give prison educators a rationale for "selecting appropriate

21 educational practices and actively resisting social and cultural forces that distort and delimit

22 adult learning" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 11).

As transformative learning theory has developed, others have studied more emancipatory learning with a focus on positionality, diverting from a focus on cognition (Johnson-Bailey, 2012). Indeed, most inmate students in adult basic education or GED classes are there not by choice, but as a requirement of their prison sentence, well aware of their position behind bars and razor wire, with correctional officers down the hallway from their classroom. Initial resistance to being taught has been found to be a powerful choice they have in the face of something that has ill-served them in previous years (Muth & Kiser, 2008).

Mezirow's initial research on perspective transformation or transformative learning pointed to a disorienting dilemma that led to feelings that require self-examination and a critical assessment of one's assumptions (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1997). Cranton (2002) focused on the power teachers have to create such a disorienting dilemma or what she called an "activating event" that sparks dialogue and fresh thinking because of the discrepancy it creates. For instance, a learning exercise that leads to a new moment of academic success can allow inmate learners to have to rethink their definitions of themselves as failures in the classroom. The availability of the teacher and fellow learners to provoke reflection on a new sense of self-identity in the moment of that event might extend that learning.

Mezirow (1981) focused on three kinds of learning (instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective) drawing on Habermas' descriptions of instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning. All three kinds of learning can result from activating events, but self-reflective learning has been found to contribute to self-reflective transformation (Taylor, 2007). Instrumental curricular materials are typically provided to prison educators to teach basic skills or GED courses, which some educators supplement with creative materials, poetry, plays, or in the rare times they can bring objects past the scanner, such as manipulatives. Dialogic learning,

in Mezirow's sense, invites us to understand how learners seek out opportunities or engage in a

class to use dialogue to press on their understandings. Finally, self-reflective learning might be

evident when learners reflect more deeply about who they are in the process, content, and

premises of learning, gaining some transformation of their frames of reference, including their

habits of mind and assumptions.

Method

This generic or basic qualitative study (Merriam, 2009) involved interviews with 13

correctional educators to explore their perceptions of experiences of transformation among their

inmate students. The single interviews with the 13 participants led to an analysis of the data

regarding educators' perceptions of what facilitated transformative learning in the lives of their

students and the related educational roles and strategies they used to facilitate this learning.

Participants

The participants were 13 prison educators (3 men and 10 women) at five different

northeastern United States medium and maximum-security male prisons. We asked prison

education supervisors for nominations of educators who may have witnessed a transformative

experience with an inmate student and educators perceived as going beyond their job description

and genuinely caring for the success of their inmate students. Because the purposive sample of

nominations was too small, we then initiated snowball sampling and asked the initial participants

to recommend other prison educators who fit the specified profile. Initial interviews were, on

average, 90 minutes long.

All of the educators had at least 10 years of experience teaching in a prison. Three taught

adult basic education (ABE) classes for students. Seven taught pre-GED and GED classes for

students who were almost ready to take their high school equivalency exam. The three remaining

participants were volunteers who taught college level classes on business management,

psychology, and creative writing. The experiences of two of the three volunteers who taught

college level classes seemed to be outliers; finding the students easier to motivate from the very

first day because the students were there by choice. We refer to the educators with pseudonyms

in this paper.

Interview Protocol

The interview questions invited reflection on relationships with students, roles and

strategies used in the classroom, and moments that may have accelerated learning. We did not

use the term *transformative learning* and made no assumptions about the participants'

knowledge of the theory, hence the data analysis process sought to apply the theory with a priori

coding to interpret the interview transcripts.

The interviews also inquired about the educators' experiences of synchronicity in the

classroom (Jung, 1960) though analysis of the sparse responses is not included in this report.

While we found few of the educators understood this concept of meaningful coincidence and the

acceleration of learning that synchronicity might lead to, the questions did lead to our

exploration of educators' experiences of activating events, referred to as "teachable moments".

The interview questions included:

1. What were your thoughts about teaching in a prison when you began? Do you recall your

   initial impressions or thoughts about the role (contribution) you could make or were

   making?

2. How do you feel about the different aspects of teaching in a prison? Probes included: Can

   you describe the present and past relationships you have had with your inmate students?

   Do you have strategies you use to develop positive relationships with your inmate

students? If so, have you had opportunities for teachable moments? Can you describe

some of them?

3. What roles do you feel you play in the classroom? Probes included: What do you believe

to be your most important role? Teacher, mentor, counselor? Do you believe any of these

roles are significant in your inmate students making a transformation? If so, can you tell

me about a time when you experienced such a transformation?

Coding

In the initial open coding process we listened for types of roles and strategies used by the

educators. In the secondary analysis of the data we found that the responses regarding *teachable*

moments could be understood as "activating events". We also used the following *a priori* codes:

disorienting dilemmas, altered meanings and frames of reference, and types of learning.

Subcodes emerged from constant comparison during coding as well as use of Kitchenham's

(2006) subcodes in his analysis of interviews, journal entries, a questionnaire, and field notes

regarding 10 teachers' experiences of perspective transformation as they gained understanding of

and use of educational technology. The emergent codes and a priori codes are listed in Table 1

with an example of each from the interview data. The limited number of examples of each

subcode in the secondary data analysis of the elements of transformative theory did not allow a

quantitative assessment of the frequency of incidences of each subcode. However, we did draw

at least one example from each of the 13 interviews.

Limitations

The study is limited by the purposive nature of the sample and the choice of using

secondary analysis of a dataset. The findings are also limited by not having reports from the

inmate students themselves; we have only educators' perceptions of students' learning, as no

observations were conducted in the learning settings and no interviews with students were

possible given the difficulties of pursuing permission from a research ethics board in the time

frame allowed for this research study. The educators tended to report on challenging dialogues

they had had with students, not about dialogues among students, also contributing to a limitation

in our interpretation of the results in light of transformative learning theory. This may be a

consequence for educators working in a restrictive prison environment where they struggle to

gain enough trust in the classroom for risk-taking dialogue among class members.

Findings

Evidence was found of the educators' perceptions of inmate students' transformative

learning facilitated by disorienting dilemmas and activating events; altered perspectives; revised

frames of reference; and instrumental, dialogic, and self-reflective types of learning, as well as

educators' shared reflections regarding the contribution to students' learning made by the roles

they played and the strategies they used. Several stories offered by the interviewees could have

been coded with multiple codes regarding evidence of transformative learning, such as the

following quote which we coded both as "initial assumptions: I can't learn" and as "type of

learning: dialogic learning and self-reflective learning."

He came in yelling, "I told them not to put me in school. The last time I got thrown out of

school because I punched the teacher in the face." "Ok," I said, "look, I will meet you

halfway if you will meet me halfway." "Ok," he says, and sat down. He was extremely

learning disabled…his math, he could multiply some numbers but that was about it. So I

started teaching him how to do long division. He says to me," ok, I did it now and I'm

never doing math again." Ok, the next day he comes in and says "I did three pages in my

cell, would you check it for me, please?"

All of the 13 educators perceived they had witnessed at least one inmate student undergo a transformative process. The stories they recounted were usually based on the sustained teacher-student relationship and respectful dialogue as well as the challenging discourse between the teacher and an individual student. They reported that their positive reinforcement seemed to lead to a student's sense of accomplishment, and as a student's education progressed, a move away from his negative self-identity was an indication to the educators that a change in a frame of reference had occurred. For example, Roxanne perceived that her carefully designed lessons, which included milestones students could easily reach, led to accomplishments that played a large role in improved self-esteem, motivation, and possible transformation.

Overtime the educators also observed students' increased motivation to do school work and a positive change in overall attitude. Mary used students' personal goals as a motivation to learn, which she thought might lead to transformation. For instance, Mary worked with a student who wanted to get his truck-driving license. Mary obtained the manual and used it as a catalyst for teaching him how to read, noting that taking the driving test, "was a very big step. I thought that was a real transformation". Michael, proud of his effort to help students succeed in class and get their GED said, "Once they get their GED there is so much self-esteem that enters into their being. That's something I think contributes to transformation." Michael saw such a transformation, perhaps based on a student reframing his assumptions of himself as a learner, as spreading to others witnessing the accomplishment.

Learners' Initial Assumptions Set the Stage for Disorienting Dilemmas

Eleven of the 13 educators reported about students' negative attitudes about learning and themselves as learners. We identified their perceptions of students' prior frames of reference and

1   assumptions about themselves as learners in two emergent subthemes: *I can't learn* and *you*

2   *can't make me*. (See Table 1 for examples from the interviews.)

3   The educators' stories about their experiences with prisoners typically had two aspects:

4   first encounters when they witnessed anger, resistance, and doubt followed by the growth that

5   happened later. This sequential ordering was not framed by the order of the interview questions,

6   but was part of the narrative of the interviewees. Several interviewees talked about their

7   students' previously unsuccessful learning opportunities and how difficult it was to invite

8   learners to engage in the required curriculum. Stories of inmates who reported that they had

9   previously hit teachers or been kicked out of classes in their K-12 schooling suggested inmates'

10   experiences had reinforced the idea that learning and school were not a place for transformation.

11   Educators did not often report about having to create disorienting dilemmas; rather they

12   observed how the prison classroom is itself disorienting. We coded evidence of disoriented

13   dilemmas in three subcodes (see Table 1):

14   •   the teacher claims I can learn;

15   •   I'm acting badly but the teacher is not writing me up; and

16   •   how can my mind be free in prison?

17   All the educators reported they had observed inmate students who had experienced

18   transformation in their epistemic and psychological assumptions of themselves as learners, and

19   10 of the 13 educators reported that they facilitated this transformation by using a teachable

20   moment, similar to Cranton's (2002) concept of an activating event. The educators were also

21   aware that their efforts to create enjoyable classrooms with engaging activities presented

22   disorienting dilemmas to new students who had, up until that time, perceived education as a

23   blaming, painful environment full of failure or efforts to fake it or pass through.

Their reports of activating events were more oriented towards promoting learning than opening up a dilemma. Some teachers asked students to "free" their minds while behind bars. Several reported that they did not write up misbehaving students when they could have, choosing not to participate in the bureaucracy of penalties based on behaviorist learning theory. Several educators told stories of how they did not balk when students spent the first several classes resisting doing anything. Teachers kept saying "you can do it" or offered learning materials and opportunities despite the lack of evidence to suggest this was welcomed by the student.

We did hear a few accounts of class-wide disorienting dilemmas. Roxanne shared what happened when a correctional officer belittled her in front of her ABE class, which caused a tension in class. Should the students stand up for their teacher? Should she resist the officer's disrespectful use of power? Rather than exacerbate the conflict by defending herself publicly, Roxanne turned quickly to the class and used her explanation and response to their subsequent challenges as an activating event for her students.

It is about using your head to figure out what is the best thing to do to create the less harm… I talked about it to the class and we continued to talk about it and we talked about always making sure that you're safe…You have to think about this like when you are out on the street or on the block or you're with someone who is dangerous.

Altered Meaning Schemes and Revised Frames of Reference

Using the subcodes used by Kitchenham (2008), we found evidence of altered sets of meaning schemes and perspectives and revised frames of reference. Table 1 includes examples of each subcode. Codes for altered sets of meaning schemes were:

- comfort or growing ease with altered meaning;

- past experiences;

- adaptation of beliefs and strategies to accommodate meaning schemes;

- questioning and recognizing others question their beliefs;

- applying meaning schemes;

- using resources to gain changed meaning; and

- feeling uncomfortable with social expectations.

Subcodes for revised frames of reference were:

- doing something in relationship to learning;

- experiencing a role change as a learner; and

- seeing change over time.

Perceptions of Self-Reflective Learning

The prison educators reported using the three types of learning characterized by Mezirow (2000). Table 1 gives examples of each subcode used to capture aspects of the three types of learning. They used instrumental learning to get required curriculum and informal curriculum across, and did so effectively by seizing teachable moments by using techniques we coded as emergent themes:

- teachers design activating events to facilitate learning and

- academic skill lessons allow introduction of informal life skill lessons.

Dialogic learning was coded emergent themes of:

- humor and fun in communication;

- respectful, safe communication; and

- use of linguistic code switching for humor and gaining a sense of power.

Self-reflective learning emerged in the stories of the teachers, and were coded in two ways:

- inmates' change in their self-perception and their perception of others and

1   •   inmates' change in their perception of their role in the future.

2   We did not discern evidence of inmate learners' critical self-reflection, apart from self-reflection

3   as a type of learning.

4   Table 1: Themes and Subthemes Regarding Transformative Learning

5

Themes	Sub Themes	Sample Participant Quotations
Students' initial frames of reference and assumptions upon beginning classes while in prison	I can't learn	I felt like I could contribute not just to their academic achievement but there were so many that did not have the experience of successful learning. They had been in so many, so experiences for them in school had been failures. Some of them had never gone to school. (6)
	You can't make me	An inmate student came in and had an attitude problem. His attitude was, [grumbling noises], when he came into the classroom. I would say, 'what's the matter?', and more grumbling noises but in the end, he became my best friend and I would have to chase him away. He actually made it to the GED level and his nasty attitude was gone by the time he had completed his schooling. He was not grumbling anymore. (8)
Disorienting dilemmas and activating events	The teacher claims I can learn	They know that they can learn from me and feel safe, comfortable, and know that I am helping them get their GED. Because they feel that people have given up on them and nobody really wants to help them and they ask me why. I want to help them…I don't judge them, it is not my job. My job is to teach them. No matter what you find they are in for, because I don't know or want to know, I treat them like human beings. (9)
	I'm acting badly, but the teacher is not writing me up	He said, "I am here but I don't want to be here." He was from a decent family too. He said, "my mother could never get me to do anything in school. The teachers could never get me to do anything in school and you're not going to get me to do anything in school." [Laughter.] I said to him, "good afternoon, have a seat." The next day he came in and I had his folder ready for him. He said, "I am not going to do anything". I could have written him up and just gotten him thrown out. I said to myself, "no I'm not going to do that, he is a challenge for me". (4)
	How can my mind be free in prison?	And when you think about it, the correctional facility is a coercive environment. And all of a sudden we are asking men to feel free. To write, to read, to open up their minds, and become truly free. I tell them, I tell them at orientation, I say it all the time, "you can imprison the body but you cannot imprison the mind unless you give yourself permission to have your mind imprisoned". I think when the successful teacher is in the classroom the men come equally into that room. Because they are shutting out corrections and they are putting themselves in an environment that pulls them out of the physical plant. (4)
Altered sets of meaning schemes and perspectives	Comfort: growing ease with altered meaning	The unfortunate part about working with the inmates in a prison is you are not supposed to have any feedback or any type of interaction after they leave prison. But, I would hear little encouragements. I also believe that is the way the inmates carried themselves before they leave. They would come

by to tell me before they would leave, "thank you". (10)

Past experiences		He came in yelling, "I told them not to put me in school. Last time I got thrown out of school because I punched the teacher in the face" …He was extremely learning disabled…his math, he could multiply some numbers but that was about it. So I started teaching him how to do long division. He says to me, "ok, I did it now and I'm never doing math again". Ok, the next day he comes in and says "I did three pages in my cell, would you check it for me, please".(2)
Adaptation of beliefs and strategies to accommodate meaning scheme/perspective		They know that they can learn from me and feel safe, comfortable, and know that I am helping them get their GED. Because they feel that people have given up on them and nobody really wants to help them and they ask me why… I don't judge them, it is not my job. My job is to teach them. No matter what you find they are in for, because I don't know or want to know, I treat them like human beings. *(9)*
Questioning: recognizing other also question their beliefs		Some of the guys want to drop out of the program and the other guys won't let them. They work with them and encourage them to sit down and do it together. They help each other in ways that I don't think they have had help from others. (3)
Application: applying meaning scheme or perspective		Then our new supervisor which was a gorgeous looking young gal came down to the classroom and they had never met her before and I introduced her to the class and I said, "and you know Ms. So and So I would like each of the men to introduce themselves to you." And we had been practicing this and I know they are going to do this very well and each one of them did so spectacularly and I was so proud of them and it got them smiling. Now they could see how this skill paid off because they got to introduce themselves to a nice new good looking young supervisor.(6)
Resources: using resources to gain changed meaning scheme/perspective		Sometimes I would get a little feedback from the fellas who knew I had worked with someone they knew. They would say, "Mr. Whomever is doing very well and he feels you helped him a lot." (10)
Outside expectations: feeling uncomfortable with social expectations		So most of them have no self-esteem and they are resistant to coming into the room…they can be quite hostile. It was on a Monday and they were all seated and I was handing out various math papers. The door opens and this guy… I don't know how he got into the room. He was bigger and taller than me and said, "Don't you give that to me. I ain't doing it and nobody can make me do nothing I don't want do!" [Laughter.] I told him "you don't have to do it if you don't want to, but would you like to see a grown woman cry?" [Laughter.] The student said, "oh give me that, and he took the paper from my hand and sat down and started working." One of the inmates said to another, "she got another one". [Laughter.] You have to know how to handle them without turning them off. (2)
Revised Frames of reference	Taking action: doing something in relationship to learning	They have to feel safe enough to make a mistake and know that there is enough control from the teacher that the class would not even consider laughing or making fun. For an adult to raise his hand and ask a question, which may very well in his mind appear to be stupid, takes a great deal of trust. *(4)*
	Role change: a fundamental	While a guy that was first very apprehensive about it is now at my desk with a different yearning and he recognizes that now he can do this….But once

	change in role as learner	they get their GED there is so much self-esteem that enters into their being that that's what they want. That's something I think contributes to the transformation.(1)
	Transformative journey: change over time	It is not all about him anymore. It is about looking after his family. I thought that was a real transformation. (7)
Instrumental learning	Teachers design activating events to facilitate learning	For example, you might see somebody fooling around with a pen or trying to get ink to come out of it and you say, "what's the problem, oh, the pen's out ink." I will say "is the pen really out of ink, how does a ballpoint pen work?" We do a physics exercise. A lot of them will get a kick out of it. So sometimes the classroom affords us the opportunity to digress on things.(*13)*
	Academic skill lessons allow introduction of informal life skill lessons	With real estate being an excuse to get me behind prison walls (I) could teach about life through real estate.(5)
Communicative learning	Humor and fun in communication	I used a lot of humor. I find that when things are not going as they should, you don't accuse them You can write them up, you can call an officer. [Instead] I kid around with them and they love it. And they kid around back. And they are very respectful despite sometimes they try to be cute. (2)
	Respectful, safe communication	He came in yelling "I told them not to put me in school. The last time I got thrown out of school because I punched the teacher in the face." "Ok," I said, "look, I will meet you have way if you will meet me half way". "Ok," he says and sat down. (2)
	Using linguistic code switching for humor and inmates' sense of power	They had to write a 500 - 800 word essay … and it has to be properly done. Introduction, body...We ended the first session and two of the men escorted me down the hall and one of them said as we were walking down the hall, "I'm having an awful hard time with this introduction." And we had just reached the officer's desk as he said, "I don't know what to do with the body." Well the officer looked up and we both started laughing. (2)
	Learning Process: learning within present meaning schemes	This inmate student came into my classroom and he came in and was sick and had HIV. By the end of his stay with me, he told the other guys that "she is the best teacher ever and you need to listen to her and you pay attention to her, you will learn a lot from her and don't give her any crap". (8)
	Process: learning new meaning schemes	If the man happens to all of the sudden click and realize that when he is looking in the mirror he is looking at the person who is responsible for his difficulties. And he is not blaming other people. Then, all of a sudden the barriers start to come down and I think he is more apt to listen to the teacher. And I think a correctional teacher who was successful is a facilitator. He or she is not doing the work but guiding the inmate to the goal whatever it might be. (2)
	Process: learning through meaning schemes by restructuring what you know	One guy .. came back and spoke at graduation. He said to the men .. that .. finding someone who can turn on that light for you or at least make you realize what your potentials might be is the key. Because without first opening up that door it makes no difference if you go out because you're still, … a prisoner of your lack of knowledge or your lack of being open to

		accepting new ideas." (4)
Self-reflective	Change of their psychological self-perception and perception of others.	I had one guy who had a chip on his shoulder the size of a log… it took a long time to settle into the classroom although he never caused a problem. ... My last day of teaching before retiring he walked to the door and then turned around and came back and said to me, "Don't say anything, just listen to me". He said, "when I was first found guilty I hated all white people but since being in your classroom I've learned to judge people as individuals". Now that was the greatest gift he could given me. (2)
	Change of their perception of their role in future	Their families, their families, their families. They all talk about wanting to do things for their families. They did not know what their families meant until they were not with them. (3)

Note: the numbers included after the quotes represent the 13 interviewees, and all of whom are represented in this table.

Educators' Roles and Strategies Perceived to Facilitate Transformative Learning

The initial study regarding perceptions of roles and teaching strategies that led to synchronistic experiences in the classroom led to emergent coding regarding the educators' general role in the classroom as a role model and a counselor seeking opportunities for dialogue that might change an inmate's negative frame of reference. Their dominant strategies were the use of humor and respectful encouragement.

The educators reported maximizing the counseling aspect of education to meet their teaching goals. Part of this counseling role of educator was to create a safe environment so that students could ask questions and risk revealing what they did not know. While noting they were not hired as counselors, all 13 participants believed that prison educators have to engage in dialogue and risk moving out of a "safe" zone of maintaining power or being a directive educator, often by exercising counseling skills. Prison counselors have large caseloads, and inmate students may only see their counselor once a month. The educators reported that many times an inmate student arrived in class very upset about something, so the educators applied counseling strategies to encourage openness to learning. Using this informal role of counselor

1   opened up opportunities for dialogic learning, which we found most often reported as a result of

2   teacher-student dialogue rather than student-student dialogue.

3   Each of the 13 educators believed they served as a role model; because of the nature of

4   their relationship with their inmate students, some of the students would recognize positive

5   characteristics they modeled and would be able to learn new values and new social skills. The

6   educators observed that when inmate students began to apply these new values that defining

7   moments of transformation occurred.

8   All of the educators said that for inmate students to experience a transformation there

9   must be a mutual respect between student and teacher. Rhoda believed that the responsibility

10   falls mostly on the educator's respectful attitude in the classroom. Lois felt that teachers must be

11   cognizant of the fact that inmate students are constantly observing them and testing their

12   sincerity. Anne said that inmate students are human beings and that transformation is a result of

13   treating them like human beings. Lori recalled how the criminal justice system can sometimes

14   create race barriers and that a good teacher will help break down those barriers by showing

15   respect.

16   The majority of the educators believed that using humor was the most useful tool for

17   having a positive impact on the men. Ten of the 13 educators observed that they had learned that

18   using humor with inmate students was an effective strategy for developing positive relationships

19   and for reframing assumptions brought to the learning setting. Some spoke of interweaving

20   humor in planned lessons, and others displayed a sense of humor in their informal interactions

21   with inmate students. Humor took the form of laughter, light teasing, existential awareness of the

22   contrast between the trust and respect of the classroom compared with the rigid life in the prison

setting, playing with different meanings of words and meta-dialogue to talk about sex, body

parts, and swear words.

Summary of Findings Prison educators' perceived inmate students experienced

transformative learning in a classroom when they exercised the roles of counselor and role model

and incorporated the strategies of respect and humor to activate events in the classroom to

promote both instrumental and transformative learning. The educators pointed to moments when

an activating event occurred or the teacher created an event that could help a learner make new

meaning, thus opened up a possibility of transformation for the learners. Positive or surprising

classroom experiences and the resulting discourse in class or self-reflection in one's cell after

class may have led to altered meaning schemes and new frames of reference because many

inmate students felt they were making progress in academics for the first time in their lives while

their previous experiences in classrooms may have been predominantly negative.

Discussion

A major component of Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory is the

development of a positive relationship between teacher and student and a supportive

environment. All of the participants in this study recognized the importance of developing a

positive relationship with their inmate students and all reported on how they worked to build a

supportive, respectful environment in their locked down classrooms. They all could describe an

occurrence of a transformation in their inmate students and, while not claiming full responsibility

for the transformation, they did express that they played a significant role in it. Taylor's (2007)

review of research on transformative learning concluded that relationships are an essential factor

in transformational research. Mottern (2013) also found that educators in court-mandated adult education programs developed a special relationship with students, characterizing it as a "chiasm," a concept drawn from Merleau-Ponty's understanding that "I can feel myself touched as well and at the same time as touching" (as cited in Mottern, 2013, p. 24).

Many of the educators labeled themselves as supportive, caring advocates of their students. This finding is consistent with Wright's (2004) exploration of the concept of care in prison classrooms and conclusion that inmate students respond well to educators who genuinely care for their students. Most of the educators felt that their encouragement strategies reinforced the positive student-teacher relationship, resulting in a possible transformation. All of the educators articulated that there had to be a mutual respect between the teacher and student, consistent with Mezirow's principles.

All of the educators felt that humor was a great strategy for developing a positive relationship with students and that humor was particularly valuable in lightening the mood in such a hostile environment or for opening learners up to a new way of seeing a familiar situation. The use of humor in the classroom may be a good example of what Cranton (2002) referred as an activating event. The power of humor, which has been analyzed in other organizations (Robert & Yan, 2007), may be more effectively tapped in prison classrooms to promote better critical discourse when reframing a disorienting dilemma.

While it is difficult to discern evidence of all 10 phases of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978) in a secondary analysis of interviews with educators regarding their perceptions, we believe the interviews lent themselves to analysis within this theoretical framework.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research

Prison educators can have an important impact on society. If a prison teacher is able to assist in the transformation of one inmate student, then this inmate student may have an impact on his or her children, spouse, or siblings; community members; and other members of society, as well as other inmate students within the borderlands education of prisons. This study affirmed that prison educators perceive they play a significant role in inmates' transformative learning experiences. Supervisors of prison education systems can seek out such educators who are willing to respectfully assume the roles of role model and counselor, to invite critical reflection and humor, and to seize activating moments to spark critical reflection. Supervisors can also offer professional development to reinforce these strategies as well as examine classroom experiences through the interpretative lens offered by transformative learning theory. In particular, Muth and Kiser's (2008) data collection among correctional educators suggested that online discussions can lead educators to change their frames of reference regarding teaching strategies.

Clarifying boundaries is an important concern in prison education systems. Given that equalization of power may be particularly important in establishing authentic relationships that can lead to critical dialogue (Eisen, 2001), a prison classroom creates a particularly challenging opportunity. Caution needs to be focused on helping educators understand what boundaries are necessary in caring relationships with prisoners who may have had little such support in their lives (Muth & Kiser, 2008; Wright, 2004); however, the potential for transformative learning is great.

Research is needed to better understand how to get past inmates' resistance to learning, in particular with the use of constructivist and transformative teaching strategies. In Muth and Kiser's (2008) study of prison educators, participants often explained students resisted anything

they perceived was a deflection from the main purpose of a course, such as learning the content

to prepare for the GED test. This student resistance may indicate educators are relying too much

on particular planned constructivist teaching strategies, such as role playing, instead of seizing

activating events that encourage critical reflection. Garvett (2004) also found that educators

needed help implementing new knowledge of the pedagogy of critical reflection. Research that

would allow listening to inmates while they are in an intentionally transformative learning

setting, as Kitchenham (2006) set up in his study of educators learning to use instructional

technology, could also be very instructive.

　　　Merriam (2010), Mezirow (2004), and Taylor (2007) have all called for research that

explores application of transformational learning theory in distinct settings that have been under

researched. This study's findings add to the limited research, suggesting that there are

opportunities to apply the theory's pedagogical framework in prison classrooms, supporting and

perhaps extending the work of educators already exercising effective characteristics,

commitment, creativity, strategies, and skills.

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