Ricerca

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Metodologie di ricerca e pratiche didattiche per promuovere apprendimenti trasformativi nei contesti sociali e organizzativi

a cura di

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Introduzione

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L'idea di questo numero nasce da un workshop internazionale di studio a Bergamo, svoltosi il 23-24 maggio 2019, dal titolo *Metodologie di ricerca e pratiche didattiche per promuovere apprendimenti trasformativi nei contesti sociali e organizzativi*, promosso *dall'Italian Trasformative Learning Network.*

Gli interlocutori dell'evento erano ricercatori e ricercatrici impegnati in un confronto sulle esperienze di ricerca e formazione che hanno come paradigma la teoria dell'apprendimento trasformativo: il presente numero rappresenta l'artefatto materiale di questo gruppo.

Il workshop ha offerto un'occasione di confronto critico tra le varie esperienze in corso e un setting dove condividere criticità, traduzioni situate, e punti di sintesi comuni e prefigurazioni di sviluppi futuri. Si è configurato come una comunità dove condividere pratiche di ricerca comuni e dove si scambiano conoscenze e si aprono confronti dialettici su focus diversi.

Pur aderendo ad uno stesso *framework* teorico, ciò che diventa prioritario è la possibilità di un confronto capace di far emergere le differenze e le opzioni culturali, le metodologie sperimentate.

L'iniziativa ha visto la partecipazione di Victoria Marsick, Presidente *dell'International Transformative Learning Association*, Direttrice del Programma di dottorato AEGIS (*Adult Education Guided Intensive Study*, del *Teachers College, Columbia University*, fondato da J. Mezirow), *visiting professor* per molti anni presso i corsi magistrali dell'Università di Bergamo. La sua presenza come *keynote speaker* ha consentito di aprire confronti dialettici finalizzati alla validazione delle ricerche in corso. Si sono rese disponibili così una serie di pratiche condotte seguendo una prospettiva critica e innovatrice nel modo di concepire la conoscenza e l'apprendimento.

Gli interventi rispondono alla domanda relativa a quali condizioni l'apprendimento diventa una traiettoria per promuovere trasformazioni significative, seguendo una linea argomentativa tipica di chi studia i problemi nel loro svolgersi nella vita quotidiana delle persone, delle comunità, delle organizzazioni.

La prospettiva adottata è quella di un approccio situato ad una teoria che non vuole essere onorata, ma sviluppata grazie al confronto, allo scambio pluri-metodologico e pluri-paradigmatico mettendo in rete attori, artefatti materiali e immateriali secondo i nuovi orizzonti che di volta in volta emergono. Interessati tutti a costruire una *polis* che produca una conoscenza utile su un tema, quale quello dell'apprendimento, su cui tutti contano per il potere che ha di trasformare e sviluppare quegli ancoraggi abitudinari che ostacolano i processi di cambiamento dei soggetti, delle comunità e delle organizzazioni.

Un aspetto emergente è stato il riconoscimento della necessità di apprendere come ricercatori come costruire un sapere che sia frutto di un'interazione con i soggetti coinvolti, che abbia interesse a coltivare comunità riflessive. Come ridurre le distanze tra saperi accademici e processi di vita quotidiana, per valorizzare il sapere prodotto dall'esperienza? Come supportare i processi di validazione degli apprendimenti pregressi di cui non siamo consapevoli e che, a volte, rappresentano un ostacolo al cambiamento personale, comunitario e organizzativo?

Tradotte in termini di epistemologia della ricerca, queste domande orientano verso la necessità di mettere in relazione tutti gli attori coinvolti nella ricerca (*insider* e *outsider*), artefatti materiali e immateriali, interessi e possibili ambiti di reciproco influenzamento, in un campo dove coltivare nuovi scenari e possibili contaminazioni (Shani, Guerci, & Cirella, 2014). La ricerca trasformativa è il nome emergente che si è dato a tutte quelle pratiche che promuovono una rivisitazione dei rapporti tra università e contesti reali, che vogliono lavorare per ridurre la distanza tra saperi accademici e processi concreti. Uno dei punti di partenza più condivisi è quello di muovere da domande di ricerca emergenti dai problemi che gli operatori sul campo sperimentano tutti i giorni, adottando quel processo di *inquiry* (Wenger, 1998) che indica che non esiste una conoscenza da applicare ma una conoscenza da cocostruire.

Ciò che più manca, almeno nelle tradizioni di ricerca nazionali, è un dibattito sulle metodologie, interpretate come contesti composti da costrutti concettuali e schemi operativi.

In questo senso, il focus di tutti gli interventi del numero è centrato sulla riflessione su metodologie, pratiche, strategie, tecniche e strumenti per facilitare le differenti forme di trasformazione delle prospettive in contesti sociali, professionali, organizzativi, digitali.

La nostra tesi è che parlare di metodologie significa chiamare in causa un costrutto che al proprio interno contiene categorie interpretative, opzioni teoriche e procedure. Optare per una metodologia significa decidere come interpretare e come intervenire su un problema.

Per condurre la trattazione, siamo partiti dal prendere atto della sedimentazione di una serie di pratiche. Le ricerche nell'ambito del paradigma trasformativo sono per lo più qualitative - anche se c'è un interesse sempre più crescente per gli strumenti di valutazione quantitativi dei risultati di apprendimento - adottano *active learning methodologies*, prevedono una collaborazione sempre più assidua tra ricercatori *insider* e *outsider*. Parlare di *Action Learning*, *Action Learning Conversations*, metodi simulativi, *experience-based methods*, significa chiamare in causa orientamenti, paradigmi, che si materializzano in determinati approcci, che consentono di agire la ricerca e di attribuire agli attori ruoli diversi a seconda delle conoscenze di cui sono portatori.

In questo senso, si apre una terza fase dello sviluppo della teoria trasformativa, che chiede da una parte di "spacchettare" e dettagliare le metodologie in uso, evitando così di "consumare" costrutti innovativi piuttosto che utilizzare e sviluppare costrutti innovativi. Non tutta la ricerca può essere trasformativa. A quali condizioni la ricerca può essere definita trasformativa? Quali sono le condizioni discriminanti, o le condizioni di inclusione di nuove sfide? Queste sono domande aperte, fondate, però, su esperienze consolidate, capaci di configurarsi come fondamenti. C'è da tener presente la portata inclusiva di questo approccio: si parla di ricerca come di un dispositivo trasversale, in grado di traslare da un contesto disciplinare all'altro, e di delineare una mappa che chiama in causa gli studi sull'apprendimento situato (Lave, & Wenger, 1991), gli studi sulle pratiche (Wenger, 1998), gli studi sul sociomaterialismo quotidiano (Gherardi, 2000; 2016), e quindi sull'interazione tra umani e non umani (Gherardi, Nicolini, & Strati, 2007).

Questo numero, quindi, rappresenta l'apertura di una fase in cui si presterà una cura particolare ad alcuni aspetti:

1. l'attenzione critico-riflessiva sui *processi* di ricerca, che consenta di valutare il rigore e la pertinenza di ciò che andiamo a fare;
2. l'approfondimento di come la ricerca possa produrre una conoscenza utile, necessariamente emancipativa e attenta allo studio della promozione della sostenibilità dei processi di cambiamento;
3. l'interesse verso studi che aiutino ad allineare ricerca, azione e apprendimento, e che tengano presente la dimensione etica della ricerca che si pone obiettivi trasformativi.

Il contributo più rilevante sarà dato dalla capacità di configurarsi come comunità di ricerca e di apprendimento, dove potersi confrontare con le nostre distorsioni epistemologiche e sociolinguistiche, e dove apprendere ad apprezzare ciò che non condividiamo ma che può servire a rendere più rigoroso il nostro procedere. La condivisione e la contaminazione delle esperienze e del repertorio di conoscenze tra settori disciplinari diversi rappresenta, quindi, il traduttore reticolare della ricerca trasformativa, con uno sguardo più mirato e attento a ciò che ci accade intorno.

Sezione IV

Metodologie per promuovere apprendimenti trasformativi

Toward a shared repertoire of methods and practices of fostering transformative learning: initial reflections

Francesca Bracci, Alessandra Romano, Victoria J. Marsick, Claudio Melacarne

*L'articolo presenta tre esempi che illustrano i limiti e le potenzialità applicative nell'ambito dell'*Higher Education *di una pedagogia trasformativa basata su una visione* practice-based *e femminista post-strutturalista. Questa metodologia di insegnamento ha l'obiettivo di supportare futuri/e insegnanti e educatori/educatrici degli adulti a mettere in discussione assunti dati per scontati e culturalmente assimilati sulla loro pratica, identità e ruolo professionali.*

The article examines three teaching cases that collectively illustrate a transformative pedagogy grounded in practice-based studies and post-structural feminist pedagogy. This teaching methodology can help future teachers and adult educators begin to question taken-for-granted, culturally assimilated assumptions about their professional practice, identity, and role.

Parole chiave
Apprendimento trasformativo; repertorio condiviso; approcci practice-based; pratiche riflessive; pedagogia femminista post-strutturalista

Keywords
Transformative learning; shared repertoire; practice-based approaches; reflective practices; post-structural feminist pedagogy

1. Introduction

Ideas travel globally and they take root locally. Their meanings must consequently be sought in the local contexts and within the communities of scholars and practitioners that give shape to those ideas (Gherardi, 2006). The article represents the effort to retrace a segment of the journey that the concept of transformative learning has undertaken, focusing particularly on how it has taken root in the Italian community of researchers to which three of the authors belong.

We examine three teaching cases that collectively illustrate a transformative pedagogy grounded in practice-based studies and post-structural feminist pedagogy. We introduced this teaching methodology to help future teachers and adult educators begin to question taken-for-granted, culturally assimilated assumptions about their professional practice, identity and role.

In this article we describe:

a) how the concept of transformative learning has been translated into the context of our community, which has stressed its social and situated dimensions and has formulated a practice-based view of it;

b) a teaching and learning methodological path–based on a practice-based view of transformative learning–for fostering diverse types of critical reflective practices and for leading to critical awareness and questioning of assumptions that shape professional role and identity;

c) examples of learner-centered teaching in three cases that show development of methodological trajectories for teaching and learning that offer a shared *repertoire* of practices, methods, strategies, techniques, and tools for facilitating different forms of transformative learning in group settings and for assessing the outcomes of them.

Specifically, we are interested in sharing the theoretical and methodological trajectories[1] that led us to feel the need for constructing a *repertoire* of negotiable resources accumulated over time, useful to systematize the vast array of purposes, settings, and practices through which transformative learning is being fostered and assessed.

The term *repertoire* is borrowed from Lave & Wenger (1991), Wenger (1998), and Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder (2002), and it is located within the practice-based studies tradition. These scholars define it as one of the three dimensions–together with *mutual engagement* and *joint enterprise*–through which practice can become a source of coherence of a community. In Wenger's community of practice framework, the *repertoire* includes tools, ways of doing stories, symbols, actions, artifacts, or concepts that a community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice. It is a community's set of shared resources characterized both by a history of learning and an availability for further engagement in practice.

In the past two decades, interest has been growing in the field of adult and higher education about the practice of fostering transformative learning. It has become a dominant teaching paradigm based on promoting change, where educators challenge learners to critically question and assess the integrity of their deeply held assumptions about how they relate to the world around them (Mezirow, 2000: Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The community of scholars and practitioners engaged in transformative learning extends across the globe and involves a variety of disciplines and educational settings—among them: higher education, professional education, organizational development, international education, and community education. These increasingly global and interdisciplinary groups of researchers and educators cannot be viewed as a single community, but as a *constellation* of interrelated communities and, therefore, of interconnected practices. The term *constellation* indicates a particular way of seeing these social configurations and practices as intertwined and depending on the perspective one adopts (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Taylor (2017b) argues

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[1] The term *trajectory* doesn't imply a fixed course, a destination, or a path that can be foreseen or charted. It suggests a continuous motion–that has a momentum of its own in addition to a field of influences. It has a coherence through time that connects past, present, and future.

that the emerging presence of alternative perspectives of transformative learning has challenged scholars and practitioners to look beyond transformative learning as defined by Mezirow and has offered teaching practices grounded in empirical research and supported by sound theoretical assumptions. Gunnlaugson (2008) suggests that the field of transformative learning is in the *second wave* of its development; that is, it is moving toward the integration of the various factions of the theory and into a more holistic perspective.

As Hoggan (2016a) described, transformative learning represents a *metatheory:* an umbrella concept under which several trajectories of approaches aggregate. It refers to "processes that result in significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (p. 71). Hoggan (2016a, 2016b) uses the distinction–typical of the social sciences–between a *synthetic* and an *analytic metatheory* to demonstrate how the transformative learning theory has been operating in both modes. Taylor's (1998, 2005, 2007) categorization of approaches to transformative learning provides an example of *synthetic metatheory*, as it sorts theories into categories (Wallace, 1992; Hoggan 2016a). *Synthetic metatheory* has been helpful in organizing and making sense of the research literature. On the other hand, Hoggan's (2016b) typology of transformative outcomes serves the function of *analytic metatheory* by proposing conceptual tools to aid scholars in their analysis of transformative learning. Transformative learning as *analytic metatheory* assumes that there is a range of related phenomena that the theory attempts to explain that is independent of specific perspectives. The *analytic* work of metatheory provides conceptual instruments that function as a common vocabulary that cuts across approaches so that their diversity can work together to inform an overall understanding of the phenomena (Hoggan 2016a).

Consistent with the role of *analytic metatheory*, the creation of a shared *repertoire* of practices of fostering transformative learning can represent a useful resource, both for leveraging past experience and for creating new knowledge–assumed as a process to constantly manage, update, renew, and extend. Such *repertoire* cannot be considered as a set of decontextualized teaching techniques or strategies to apply arbitrarily without an appreciation for their deep connection to the larger theoretical frameworks of transformative learning theory and to the purposes of teaching for change. At the same time, we agree with Kroth & Cranton (2014) when they affirm that there are no recipes or methods that can ensure transformative learning occurs in any context. In fact, Mezirow (1991) argues that it is potentially unethical to assume that we can change others' beliefs and assumptions.

Our idea is to provide a methodological map that adult educators and scholars can use as a conceptual tool to gain a better understanding of:

- how transformative learning processes may occur spontaneously in daily life contexts at organizational and individual level–without facilitation structures;
- which methods, tools, and techniques to adopt in group settings for facilitating different forms of transformative learning, for fostering diverse types of critical

reflective practices, and for evaluating multiple types of outcomes, as categorized by Hoggan (2015; 2016a).

Creating a *repertoire* of methodological resources shared by the *constellation* of communities engaged in the field can avoid the risk both of a fragmentation and an oversimplification into a unitary set of "best practices" of fostering transformative learning. Moreover, the expression "best practices" contains the danger of taking for granted that a "good practice" can be made explicit and formalized so that the knowledge contained in it can travel across time and space and be applied in contexts other than those in which it originated (Gherardi, 2012). This aspect may obscure the relationship between decontextualized knowledge frozen in rules and the *knowing-in-situation* kept alive through its everyday reproduction and by the educational practices that renew it by repeating it. Practices of fostering transformative learning are rendered complex not only by the incompleteness of rules but also by their heterogeneity. This article offers several points of clarity around the methodological trajectories that promote different types of transformative learning.

The next paragraphs present:

a) an overview of different perspectives on transformative learning and the contribution that a practice-based view offers to its development;

b) a methodological path—based on a practice–based view of transformative learning–for understanding, formalizing, and trying to transform the learners' taken-for-granted and culturally assimilated assumptions about their career expectations, employability, and trajectories of professional identity;

c) a conclusive reflection on the possible criteria to adopt for reviewing the empirical research literature in order to construct a shared *repertoire* of methodological practices of fostering transformative learning.

2. Looking back and looking forward on transformative learning theory

Transformative learning theory, as conceptualized by Mezirow (1991, 2000, 2006), focuses on *individuals* through their identification of problematic ideas, beliefs, values, and feelings; critical assessment of their underlying assumptions; testing of their justification through rational discourse and action to trial new perspectives; and striving for decisions through consensus building.

In transformative learning, "meaning perspectives are, for the most part, uncritically acquired in childhood through the process of socialization, often in the context of an emotionally charged relationship with parents, teachers, or other mentors. The more intense the emotional context of learning and the more it is reinforced, the more deeply embedded and intractable to change are the habits of expectation that constitute our meaning perspectives" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 4). Collectively assimilated values and cultural beliefs can limit individuals' power to use critical thinking in the analysis of their own experience or, more generally, the context in which they are surrounded. Those tacit

structures restrict the individual's ability to produce new meanings and inhibit processes of emancipation and social change: "those perspectives include distortions, stereotypes, and prejudices. They guide our decision-making and our actions until we encounter a situation that is not congruent with our expectations. At that point, we may reject the discrepant perspective or enter into a process that could lead to a transformed perspective. Learning often occurs when an alternative perspective calls into question a previously held, perhaps uncritically assimilated, perspective" (Hoggan & Cranton, 2015, p. 9).

In the field of adult education the contribution of transformative learning theory has been considered unique: Mezirow's work is conceived as the primary resource of the theory's overall development (see Taylor, 2007; Fleming, Kokkos, & Finnegan, 2019). The ubiquitous acceptance of Mezirow's individual view of transformative learning theory often led to an uncontested assumption that there is a single conception of transformative learning, overshadowing a growing presence of other theoretical conceptions. Originally, Dirkx (1998) categorized the development of transformative learning into four main strands and identified the originator of each.

Table 1. Four approaches to transformative learning theory

Type of approach:	Definitions of transformations as:	Authors:
Emancipatory	A process of consciousness-raising	Freire, 1970
Psycho-developmental	A developmental process	Kegan, 2000; Daloz, 1986
Psychoanalytic	A process of individuation	Boyd, 1991
Cultural and spiritual	A process of narrative storytelling on a personal and social level	Tisdell, 2005
Source: Personal elaboration of the authors		

After the first *wave* of transformative learning theory, many researchers tried to explore the potential links of Mezirow's theory, expanding, connecting and overlapping it with a variety of research strands. At present, a multiplicity of alternative approaches to transformative learning theory refer to similar ideas and address factors often overlooked in the dominant theory of transformation. The exciting part of the breadth of perspectives is that it has the potential to offer a more diverse interpretation of transformative learning and has significant implications for practice and expansion of the constructs underlying the theory (Taylor, 2008).

Taylor (2009) identified seven lenses in the literature through which transformative learning theory has been developed and understood: individual perspective transformation; social transformation; sociocultural context; power relationships; and on cognitive, emotional and behavioral transformations. At the first categorizations carried by Dirkx (1998), he added:

Table 2. New lenses for Transformative Learning Theory

Type of approach:	Definitions of transformations:	Authors:

Neurobiological	Explores the neurobiological processes involved in perspectives transformation	Taylor & Marienau, 2017
Race-centric	Grounds transformation in consciousness raising, activism, fostering a safe learning environment	Johnson-Bailey, 2012
Planetary view	Reframes individual transformations in terms of ecological and planetary dimension	O'Sullivan, 1999

Source: Personal elaboration of the authors

Those relevant possibilities of connections continue to resonate today and inspire further research, scholarship, and practice of communities of researchers all over the world. Recently, the original definition of transformative learning has been coupled with other theoretical perspectives, such as:

- informal and incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2019; Marsick & Neaman, 2018);
- studies on aesthetic experience and performative methodologies (Perkins, 1994; Kokkos, 2012, 2014; Romano, 2014, 2019);
- practice-based study (Fabbri, 2011; Hodge, 2014; Bracci, 2017; Bracci, Romano, & Marsick, in press).

Nevertheless, there has not been a shortage of criticism of the theory: his ideas have been subject to numerous criticisms and "alternative discourses" (Tisdell, 2012). The intent to address the rationalist orientation of Mezirow's conceptualization led to the enrichment of the field of transformative learning through the study of the role of the "emotions" and the "relationship" in perspectives' transformation. The attention for those components triggered the elaboration of multiple issues, such as affective ways of knowing, authentic relationships, expressive ways of learning, soul work, identity development, embodied learning, spirituality, and so on.

A new emotionally-informed definition of transformation of meaning perspectives flourished: "transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness; our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy" (Markos, 2015, p. 296).

Moving forward, researchers, scholars, teachers, students, and those experiencing transformative learning can continue to draw energy and inspiration from the promise and potential of new approaches to transformation. Accordingly, transformative learning theory is still in progress through the action of the communities of researchers who stretch the "original" version (Mezirow, 1978) in multiple trajectories and explore it in relation to other intellectual traditions and a variety of methodological approaches. Within this

scenario, the following sections try to define in depth some of the more recent conceptualizations of transformative learning—specifically from the standpoint of practice.

2.1. A practice-based view of transformative learning

This paragraph seeks to provoke thoughts around the possibility of taking a practice-based approach (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991) within the field of transformative learning. The contribution of practice-based studies to transformative learning offers new trajectories to go beyond the differentiation of the individual from the collective in examining learning processes. Within these frameworks, transformative learning is understood to involve not just human change but interconnections between humans and their actions with rules, tools and texts, as well as cultural, and material environments. Such interactions are often embodied, not even involving conscious cognitive activity, embedded in everyday practices, actions, and conversations (Fenwick, 2008).

A practice-based view of transformative learning is distinctive in that it:

a) emphasizes that behind all the apparently durable features of our world—from routine activities to formal organizations—there is some type of productive and reproductive work. This proposition transforms the way in which we conceive of social order and conceptualize the apparent stability of the social world (the nature of social structures, in sociological jargon, as a socio-material product);

b) forces us to rethink the question of who holds agency and in what ways, e.g., managers, the managed, etc.;

c) foregrounds the importance of the body and objects in workplace and social practices;

d) reaffirms the centrality of personal interests and of the constructs of power and positionality in inter-human or human-to-non-human relationships (Nicolini, 2012).

Practice theory, then, views practices as in some way embodied, based on tacit understandings, comprehended in practical ways. These tacit understandings, shared by individuals, are social before they are interiorized, are enacted before consciously reproduced, and, furthermore, they are taken to be constitutive of personal identity. "They prescribe ways of being human, modes of self-understanding, distinctive perspectives on the practices and the world" (Hodge, 2014, p. 168).

A practice-based approach promotes a non-dualistic construct of learners and context bound up in the dynamic unity of practice. Central are interactions with others, situated communication, the construction of situations, the relationship with the physical environment and the objects in it and, above all, the principle that these elements are tied together and express a logic of practice contextual to the situation (Gherardi, 2009; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). According to Gherardi & Perrotta (2014), theories of practice locate the source of significant patterns in how conduct is enacted, performed, or produced. The authors assume a socio-material viewpoint in which agency is distributed

between humans and non-human entities and in which the entanglement among the social world, organizational routines, and materiality can be subjected to inquiry. In transformative learning theory, the process by which we tacitly construe our meanings and frames of reference is an essential component in understanding how to foster critical reflection. Transforming meaning perspectives is not only a cognitive act of revision and change of meaning schemes, but also an act of transformation of tacit and implicit structures of thinking that derived from the practices—one that, in turn, cyclically reinforms the practices. Despite the considerations outlined above, a practice-based lens offers viewpoints that are amenable to constructing a deeper interpretation of transformative learning theory.

In practice-based accounts, participation in social practices is a key to understanding learning (Hodge, 2014). Transformative learning is portrayed as a process by which an adult discovers determinants of their thoughts, feelings and actions that may have been at work unconsciously. This discovery is made possible through the dysfunction of assumptions that have been shaping an individual's experience resulting in a *disorienting dilemma*. In the wake of this experience, the learner may engage in self-examination and critical reflection on assumptions, a path in which the person can come to realize the limitations of key assumptions and potentially renounce them. The assimilation of initial meaning perspectives corresponds to an "inbound" trajectory of membership of a large-social and community practice (Hodge, 2014). In the same context, a disorienting dilemma, self-examination, and critical assessment of prior assumptions can be conceived as an *outbound* trajectory identified by the practice-based approach (Wenger, 1998). A practice-based view of transformative learning theory sheds light on the argumentation that entails construing meaning perspectives as representations of the tacit understandings that structure social practices, and meaning perspective transformation as a process of movement from one social practice into another or across different social and community practices (Hodge, 2014).

In this sense, transformative learning appears as a special kind of learning trajectory between practices, a transformational trajectory of learning that is located in the inter-practice space emerging from the potential conflict or incompatibility in between the tacit understandings of a social practice and the shared assumptions required from belonging to a new social (or community) practice (Wenger, 1998). To illustrate our practice-based lens on transformative learning theory, we present three exemplary cases below.

3. A methodological trajectory

This paragraph presents a teaching and learning methodological path based on a practice-based approach to transformative learning (Fabbri, 2007; Gherardi, 2012; Hodge, 2014; Bracci, Romano, & Marsick, in press). This interest arose from the teaching experiences that three of the authors conducted with undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students at University of Siena and other Italian Universities during the past seven years. Our

students are enrolled in Adult Learning, Curriculum & Teaching, or Inclusive Education Programs. The courses we teach are, mostly, *Facilitating adult learning*; *Adult learning and education: Theory and practice*, *Research on organizational learning*; *Learning diversity in organization*; *Special education*; *Gender, difference, and curriculum*; *Disability, exclusion, and schooling*; *Methods of teaching in elementary school*. Our classes are, by and large, linguistically and culturally homogeneous and composed, for the most part, of Caucasian Italian women ranging in age from 20 to 30 years. The number of attending students per class is between about 20 to 100.

Our teaching experiences raised recurrent questions such as: how to help future teachers and adult educators become aware and (begin to) question taken-for-granted and culturally assimilated assumptions about their own professional practice, identity, and role? Which methods are particularly useful to accompany processes of professional development? How to engage students in dialogue devoted to analyzing the relationships among issues related to gender, class, race, power, and the construction of their own career expectations?

Answering these questions led us to frame our didactic practices within *learner-centered teaching* (Meyer & Land, 2005; Weimer, 2013; Fedeli & Tino 2019), adopting, particularly, the methodological orientations underpinned by three of the various educational theories on which it rests: a transformative approach to teaching (Taylor, 2002, 2009, 2012; Cranton, 2016), another practice-based on (Fabbri & Melacarne, 2015; Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003; Gherardi, 2012; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), and, of necessity, also a post-structuralist feminist pedagogy (Tisdell, 1998; Francis & Skelton, 2005; & Thompson, 2016). Within these frameworks, students are considered the most important actors in the learning process and their perspectives are included in the planning and programming of teaching and the curriculum (Fedeli, 2018). At the same time, the learning process is seen as nonlinear and multidimensional: a phenomenon that occurs relationally within social contexts and entails combining tacit and explicit, theoretical and practical, individual and collective knowledge (Arthur, DeFillippi, & Jones, 2001; Cornelius-White, 2007).

What these three forms of learner-centered teaching approaches have in common is that people learn from daily experiences at work, in communities, or in other social contexts (Roberson & Merriam, 2005). They incorporate teaching and learning methods that prompt learners to work on real-life problems and actual projects in a group setting with a question-driven approach for learning *through* and *from* experience (Poell, Yorks, & Marsick, 2009). Moreover, they are usually theme based and time bound (DeFillippi, 2001). In other terms, these pedagogical traditions imply the use of *participatory action methodologies*: a set of strategies and modes of teaching and intervention for professional development characterized by the principle that there is no learning without action and that every action—when placed in an appropriate context—can become a learning opportunity (Revans, 2001). This suggests the necessity of offering to the learners the opportunity to participate in spaces of intersection wherein they explore the interaction among programmed instruction of the type found in university courses, spontaneous

questioning that arises from the interpretation of professional experience, taken-for-granted assumptions, and *theories-in-use*[2].

Specifically, the practice of fostering transformative learning–seen as an approach to teaching predicated on the idea that "students are seriously challenged to assess their value systems and worldviews that are subsequently changed by the experience" Quinnan (1997, p. 42) has been at the forefront among scholars in the field of adult and higher education particularly, over the last fifteen years. Merriam & Kim (2012) consider the appropriateness of various methodologies for studying and promoting transformative learning based on three factors: one's philosophical perspective (positivist, constructivist, critical, or postmodern), the nature of the research questions, and the maturity of the topic being studied as a field of study. The third factor comes into play when the area of interest has not been well-studied and exploratory qualitative research is required. Taylor & Cranton (2012) and Taylor & Snyder (2012) underscore that the research trends concerning transformative learning are predominantly qualitative, and that there is a growing specificity in the type of qualitative design—employing studies of its phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic variations. It is useful to underline that the research designs have also expanded to include some quantitative measures that have been used in mixed-methods studies[3]. Merriam & Kim (2012) further suggest that narrative analysis, arts-based research, critical and emancipatory approaches—such as participatory action research—action research, and collaborative inquiry are taking a central place in the research literature.

In sum, the evolution of transformative learning theory has been accompanied by methodological challenges. Currently, our teaching and research experiences have posed several challenges to us, attributable mostly to the necessity of defining a methodological and conceptual map useful to gain a better understanding of which methods, tools, and techniques to adopt in group settings for facilitating different forms of transformative learning, for fostering diverse types of critical reflective practices, and for evaluating multiple types of outcomes within higher education contexts. Such challenge has also required to explicate and reflect on our theoretical and methodological points of view that—together with a transformative approach to teaching—shape our didactic practices. Practice-based studies (Nicolini, Gherardi, & Yanow, 2003; Gherardi, 2012; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) and post-structuralist feminist pedagogy (Francis &

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[2] *Theories-in-Use* and *Espoused Theories* are two kinds of *theories of action* (Argyris, Schön, 1978). *Theory-in-use* refers to the worldviews and the values reflected in behaviors that actually constitute the actions. As Argyris & Schön (1974) pointed out, people are not necessarily aware of their *theories-in-use* or that these are not always coherent with the theories they espouse, i.e., proclaim. The authors underline that if individuals are unaware of the *theories-in-use* that drive their actions, they cannot effectively manage their behaviors, which may, as a result, have unintended and undesired consequences.

[3] For example, Cranton & Hoggan (2012), and Hoggan (2016a; 2016b) refer to different ways of evaluating transformative learning, including surveys and checklists. Stuckey, Taylor, & Cranton (2014) develop a 110-item survey for assessing transformative learning outcomes and processes. Statistical analyses supported the existence of three scales related to connected or relational learning: *emotions*, *support*, and *dialogue*. King (2009) constructed the *Learning Activity Survey* Questionnaire in order to identify "whether adult learners had a perspective transformation in relation to their educational experience; and if so, to determine what learning activities have contributed to it" (p. 9).

Skelton, 2005; Thompson, 2016) represent the interpretative lenses we adopted to stress the importance of promoting an acute awareness of power and its relationship to gender and cultural difference, through the development of different types of reflective practices, interactive introspection, and collaborative communities.

A practice-based view of transformative learning argues for investigating the methodological implications and practical consequences of this interpretation of learning process as situated in the system of ongoing practices of action in ways that are relational, mediated by artifacts, and always rooted in a context of interaction. "Knowledge is thus acquired through some form of participation, and is continually reproduced and negotiated; that is, it is always dynamic and provisional" (Nicolini, Gherardi & Yanow, 2003, p. 3). Stated otherwise, this approach has five features:

a) It is oriented towards processes, or what people do in action.
b) It involves an interest in the social aspects of learning, placing processes of knowing not in the mind of the individual but in a social subject.
c) It pays attention to the un-orderly, using terms such as uncertainty, conflict, and incoherence.
d) It sees knowledge as situated in a spatio-temporal context.
e) The material, artefactual and historical aspects of social life are viewed as central for understanding how knowing and learning emerge in practice (Nicolini, Gherardi & Yanow, 2003; Gherardi, 2012).

Post-structuralist feminist pedagogy suggests how to support learners in:

a) exploring the relationship between knowledge and power, eliciting critical examination of how as knowers they are positioned in a network of human and non-human power arrangements that constrain or enable their lives;
b) re-elaborating their life and social experiences, in relation to the way they influenced and determined reproductive tendencies and distortions of perspectives about their possible trajectories of professional development;
c) acknowledging that knowledge is always partial;
d) working on identity and leadership issues, developing creativity and fostering autonomy and self-awareness (Tisdell, 1998; Bierema & Cseh, 2003).

How to socially construct and enact gender in higher education contexts was a central element of discussion among the authors, just as how to define it differently is a challenge that involves all learners. After all, gender is a construct towards which we have a culturally assimilated blindness. The knowledge produced by probing this category represents an example of reflexive knowledge, that is, of that social construction of knowledge that changes the individuals involved and the conditions of creation of the phenomenon.

All these three methodological orientations–transformative approach to teaching, practice-based studies, and post-structuralist feminist pedagogy–adopted participatory action methodologies based on *experience-based* learning and learning *from experience*. They have in common a focus on reflective practices by learners. However, *experience-based* learning methods and those linked to learning *from experience* differ in the types of

insight and meaning to be expected from reflective practices. For example, learning-from-experience methods emphasize problem-centered reflection on behavior impacting specific attainment of work objectives. The reflection included also self-examination of critical reasoning processes that underlie how students framed issues and events in their projects and class environment. By contrast, experience-based learning methods facilitated learners in discovering ecologically embedded, embodied, symbolic, and presentational ways of knowing and experiencing the type of instrumental learning required.

4. Relevant cases for fostering transformative learning

To illustrate our methodological path three cases of a practice-based approach to transformative learning will be reviewed. In this section, a practice-based approach is examined with a view to highlighting aspects of the methodological path that are amenable to interpretation in terms of transformative learning theory. In each of these examples, TL is the focus; but by drawing attention to the start and/or end points and to the processes of perspective transformation, it is possible to discern the potential role of social practices in the course of learning experiences. In broad strokes, then, TL is the framework in which we draw attention to the points of methodological trajectories that are capable of fostering perspective transformations and reflective outcomes.

The application of the different methodological paths seeks to illuminate and question internalized and taken for granted habits of mind, through the combination of conversational protocols, simulative techniques and collective dialogical practices, with linkage to the relevance of the outcomes to real life situations and future professional trajectories.

The first case is the experience of a training program for 30 Ph.D. candidates developed at University of Siena through Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry (CDAI) methodology (Nicolaides, 2015). Although the focus of the training program was on the process of construction of professional identity, the project involved describing transformed meaning perspectives about oneself as a professional. The program is particularly focused on preparing learners for challenging occupations in industries, companies, firms and factories.

The second case describes an experience relevant to the role of performative art-based methods in promoting transformative learning in higher education settings. Participants are a group of 30 undergraduate students from the second year of the Bachelors' Degree in education of an Italian University. In the first semester of the academic year 2019-2020, they took the class, *Special Education and Diversity Management,* and were required to be part of a mandatory laboratory carried out using the techniques of the Theatre of the Oppressed on the topic of *disability management*. The students were almost exclusively from Italy. The ratio of females to males was about 85:15, and the ages ranged from early 20s to late 30s.

Finally, the third case illustrates a laboratory experience carried out during the academic year 2019-2020. Participants were 33 students attending the II year of the Master's Degree in *Curriculum & Teaching* and were composed, for the most part, of Caucasian Italian women ranging in age from 20 to 30 years. In our teaching experiment, we gratefully utilized the example of Gherardi and Murgia (2015) who have been working with Italian students' representations of gender and management. We decided to adopt their stimulus text methodology to elicit our students' controversial narratives. The stimulus text (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000) is an elicitation technique used in interviews where the respondents are asked to interpret pictures or to write stories about them, to draw pictures, to play a part in or to produce metaphors describing a situation, to complete sentences, to develop collages, and to discuss movies (Gherardi, & Murgia, 2015). The students in the second year of the Master Degree were asked to volunteer to write a short story during a two-hour session. All the students (28 women and 5 men) agreed to take part in what was presented to them as an experimental project to introduce the lesson of the following week. They had 30 minutes to write the story, and the average length of each was less than a page. During the first lesson, after the students had written their stories, they were taught the basic elements of discourse analysis. During the second lesson, we introduced the constructive controversial case study based on their stories and our analysis of their stories.

In the first lesson, we gave the participants a stimulus text whose storyline they were asked to complete about which we gave them instructions as well. Two different versions of the stimulus text were used. Each student received only one version, with a fictitious male or female CEO, Marco or Irene Lorentini. They did not know that two versions of the story had been given out. The instructions for completing the story required students to imagine that they are an employee of a company, in which, for the past year, the supervisor, Irene/Marco, was the new CEO of the company. Their task is to try to evaluate how successful their new CEO, Irene/Marco, was during the last year. Students were asked to give a detailed description of the kind of manager they perceive her/him to be and to think about events in which s/he participated to complete the story. We collected 33 stories, and the sex distribution of authors roughly reflected the composition by sex of the class (28 women and 5 men): seventeen stories were written about a female CEO (15 by women and two by men). Sixteen stories were written about a male CEO (14 by women and two by men).

Table 3. Analytical Map of the Repertoire

Participants	Reflective Practices	Methods and Techniques	Assessment Tools	Learning Outcomes
30 Master and Ph.d. students at University of Siena, attending the classes of *Facilitating adult learning*, and *Research on organizational learning* (a.y. 2019-2020)	Collaborative and experiential learning methodologies	Collaborative Developmental Action Inquiry (Torbert & Associates, 2004; Nicolaides, 2015)	Transcription ad verbatim of the audio- recording of the three rounds of group discussion; narrative analysis; Reflection Questionnaire (Kember, *et al*., 2000)	Participants (a) assumed greater awareness about the connection between what participants study and what they will do in the workplaces, (b) generated informal micro research communities (among peers), (c) produced actions that can be adopted in the natural setting of community in labor world
30 undergraduate students from the II year of the Bachelors' Degree in Education, taking the class of *Special Education and Diversity Management* (a.y. 2019-2020)	Simulative, performative art-based methodology	Forum Theatre and Journal Theatre (Boal, 1995)	E-portfolio, reflective journals, Learning Activity Survey (King, 2009)	Participants were (a) empowered to intercept power asymmetries and be able to change their lives for the better; (b) connected with their emotional responses to gain a deeper understanding of themselves-within-their-worlds; (c) role-modeled through the imaginative engagement with the performance.
33 students attending the II year of the Master's Degree in *Curriculum & Teaching*	Post-structuralist feminist methodologies	Controversial case study (Gherardi & Murgia, 2015); Narrative case study	Narrative analysis; Text Analysis	Discourse analysis allows exploration of the students' positioning in a professional context and of how reality is discursively constructed in relation to the positioning of others (people or things), power relationships and the audience.

Source: Personal elaboration of the authors

We synthesize emerging implications that are drawn from the analysis of the reflective outcomes elicited with those cases. The three examples of experiences can be interpreted as trajectories connecting social practices, reflective outcomes and development of professional

identities more equipped for the challenging work of their occupation. The facilitators of the three experiences identified three shared characteristics of these approaches:

a) opportunity to make a meaningful contribution in the development of the group,
b) sensitivity to life and to real life issues,
c) being of service to others.

What is important to highlight is that the meaning-making undertaken by their participants is shaped through participation in socially-embedded performative practices. Participants' transformed perspectives can be regarded as reflecting an empowered sense of self, a critical understanding of influences on one's beliefs and feelings, and the adoption of more functional strategies and resources for taking action.

The meaning-making processes undertaken by participants are shaped through participation in collective reflective practices. These practices are diverse in more than one sense: they take place in different courses and groups and in different places. But there are common undertakings and issues and broad outcomes that characterize both such reflective practices, and the transformed perspectives described by Mezirow (2003), Taylor and Cranton (2012), which can be converged into a set of common shared meanings. Considered in terms of the concept of social practices, students who enter the classes in the three cases analyzed can be viewed as participants in the large-scale practice of the class of students who are constructing their professional identities who have been imbued with unsettling messages about the soundness of social practices that are a routine part of their own life. Once in these experiences, the participants are exposed to alternative social practices, which claim their allegiance through immersion in specific activities and shared understandings.

While outside the scope of this article, our research showed that perspective transformation occurred in many of these classes. Anecdotal observation suggested that many participants engaged in perspective transformation which was one of the desired outcomes of the methodological path. The power of the path here described lay in its capacity to stimulate self-reflective rethinking deep enough, to pose, as *new* and pressing questions what were, previously considered, "settled," taken-for-granted constructs such as professional identity, inclusion, power relationships. The technique of facilitation, grounded in a practice-based approach to transformative learning, solicits questioning "anything and everything": it problematizes assumptions and views; it deconstructs ideas and it interrupts taken-for-granted narratives (Kim, & Merriam, 2011, p. 364).

The "consciousness raising group" is central, especially in the performative methods, where the self-critical dimension was particularly felt. Drawing on people's unconscious, emotional, and intuitive aspects of meaning-making, the performative-art-based approach promotes the power and appreciation of critical reflection complemented by creative and expressive ways of knowing (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009; Clover, 2006; Knowles & Cole, 2002; Taylor, 2003)—and is, then, particularly appropriate for understanding the affective, intuitive, relational, and often irrational ways of knowing beyond the limited cognitive perspective.

Performative methodologies, through offering an intuitive or nonrational means of transformation, provide powerful opportunities to empower people and help them create their own voices (Knowles & Cole, 2002).

In the third experience, in which a constructive controversial approach to teaching was adopted, for instance, the relationship between gender and management, and also the place of management in contemporary society are strongly typed and unpacked. In fact, by eliciting opinions that will presumably be discordant, the approach enables students to discuss texts produced by themselves and to analyze them not only as expressions of individual points of view and opinions, but also as historical and cultural products embedded and justified in ubiquitous social discourses. The result is that students become more closely involved and are asked to engage in reflective iterative cycles of discovery and validations of how professional cultures are gendered.

The methodology of the constructive controversy approach brought the following advantages to the teaching of controversial themes such as genderization of professional roles and gender diversity: it fosters experiential and reflexive learning, enhances the capacity to listen to opposing ideas and respect them, teaches how an issue can be discussed from different standpoints, and facilitates personal involvement in the topics proposed while teaching how to theorize starting from personal opinions (Gherardi, & Murgia, 2015, p. 19).

5. Conclusive reflections

In this article, the attempt has been made to respond to theoretical and methodological questions prompted by drawing out complementarities between transformative learning theory and a practice-based approach.

According to the practice-based model proposed by this contribution, transformative learning does not require necessarily the initiating occurrence of a disorienting or any other dilemma that demands to be managed by predominantly resorting to cognitive means—which many scholars see as a cornerstone of the theory (Mezirow, 1991; Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Nohl, 2015). Rather, transformative learning may begin unnoticed, incidentally, and sometimes even casually, when a new practice is added to old habits (Nohl, 2015) and when participants are immersed in a new path of collective reflective practices.

The conceptual framework and the methodological repertoire herein defined potentially throw light on and facilitate understanding the processes of meaning perspective change as a transformative trajectory of participation, in which the development of critical awareness of the assumptions of one's current social practice is entangled with the initial exposure to a new practice (Hodge, 2014). Transformative learning processes are embedded in the dialectic intercourse between consciousness raising about the limitations of the tacit understandings in one's social practice and realization of the promise of understanding implicit in alternative practice. All approaches described above support individual development, but support is explicit

in the conversational protocols and in collective critical reflection path. For instance, participants are asked to monitor progress toward personal learning goals which they define before applying reflective harvest in their daily inter-practice realm.

The discussion articulated above has some limits for sure. First, the typology of methodological approaches, although covering positionalities such as age, gender, disabilities and education, may have to be revised if narratives of participants from ethnic minorities (Johnson-Bailey, 2012), from other societies (Taylor & Snyder, 2012, pp. 42-44) or those with strongly held convictions or beliefs that a neuroscience study (Westen, et al., 2006) showed are cognitively and emotionally rewarded for their blindness to, or outright rejection of viewpoints other than their own, are to be included in the process. Future research needs to further investigate the implications of the adoption of a practice-based approach among the educational practices in higher education, especially in institutions with a high level of diversity—multicultural diversity, first, but also of capability, religion affiliation, gender, and age diversities). High levels of diversity need bridging mechanisms to support empathy and understanding in order to get to the point where some of these socially based approaches are more easily implemented. Despite, or precisely because of, these limitations, we hope that the empirical results discussed inspire further empirical research and new theoretical reflections on transformative learning.

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DICHIARA

che in riferimento all'articolo: *Toward a shared repertoire of methods and practices of fostering transformative learning: initial reflections.* NUOVA SECONDARIA, p. 286-306, ISSN: 1828-4582, sono da attribuire alla scrivente i seguenti paragrafi: *§ 1. Introduction* e *§ 3. A methodological trajectory.* Sono scritti da Alessandra Romano i paragrafi: *§ 2. Looking back and looking forward on transformative learning theory* e *§ 4. Relevant cases for fostering transformative learning.* Il paragrafo *§ 2.1. A practice-based view of transformative learning* è da attribuire a Victoria Marsick e *§ Conclusive reflections* a Claudio Melacarne.

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