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The relationships between transformative education and civic education are the major aim of this special issue, focusing on historical and contemporary examples of civic transformative education, exploring contexts, and developing new theoretical approaches to uniting these two spheres of educational theory and practice. We, as editors and authors of this special issue, see ourselves arguing in the spirit with those theorists of transformative education who emphasized that transformative education has a personal and societal dimension (e.g., Mezirow, Schugurensky, O'Sullivan, Fleming; Finnegan).

Transformative moments are integral and perpetual parts of both our societies and our personal development. Societies respond, learn, and sometimes even transform in response to such factors as globalization, migration, democratization (or its opposite: xenophobia, tribalism, and polarization), climate change, or threats such as a global pandemic. And, these societal changes evoke responses, learning, and sometimes even transformation on the side of the individual. Indeed, societal transformation poses challenges for adult education theory and practice, especially those focusing on transformational dimensions of learning. Such changes at the societal level initiate or reinforce the rethinking process of individuals living in those societies. For instance, the transformations around the collapse of the Socialist block in Eastern and Central Europe meant incredible transitions from dictatorial states to democracies. These large-scale changes required citizens to rethink and even to transform their way of living in their social and political system, interacting with one another, and even how they view themselves (Kloubert, 2014, 2019).

At the same time, the transformative experience for an individual triggers, affects, and even accelerates societal change. One need to look no further than the examples from Highlander Research and Education Center or Participedia, both analyzed in this special issue. Even more, sometimes there are (societal) expectations or even requirements placed on education. Through education, especially civic education, we want to improve, change, or even transform our societies. Civic education is supposed to amend, repair, or even deeply transform our (struggling) societies. The initiative of the U.S. government to fund an interdisciplinary (and ideologically diverse group) to write the *Educating for American Democracy Roadmap* provides an example, which

offered voluntary guidance for civic education (Educating for American Democracy, 2021). Underlying this initiative is the belief that the American political culture and infrastructure are in crisis and that (better) civic education might be part of solution. Unfortunately, *Educating for American Democracy Roadmap* pays attention only to learning within K-12 education and provides limited guidance within the disciplines of history and politics. The question of experience, especially transformative learning experience, in all ages and in addition to the institutional context of school, is not reflected in this document.

We believe this special issue is timely and particularly relevant in several ways. First, in weaving together two prominent approaches in the field of learning, there is productive cross-pollination of perspectives for how we can live, co-create, and improve our societies through personal growth, and yes, transformation; and how we learn to deal with changes, shifts, and even ruptures in our societies productively and creatively. The interconnection of these two approaches helps both of them: it helps to counteract the tendency to narrow civic education to knowledge acquisition and/or voting behaviors and the tendency to consider transformative learning only from the individual perspective.

Transformative Learning and Civic Learning—Possible Areas of Overlapping and Mutual Inspiration

Within North American higher education, for instance, civic education has been narrowly defined and operationalized across behaviors, knowledge, skills, and dispositions (The National Task Force on Civic Learning Engagement, 2012; Torney-Purta et al., 2015). Institutions and their stakeholders are once again focused on understanding and developing civic education skills (e.g., information literacy, evidence-based reasoning, public speaking, empathy, and collaboration). While the framing of civic education and learning around skills is useful, more than a skill-based focus is necessary for cultivating a civic learning capable of meaningful transformation. We define civic education in broader terms including learning initiatives for youth and adults with the aim of fostering and improving the democracy in different contexts in changing societies. We do not limit this to citizenship education (cf. e.g., Sliwka et al., 2006), but emphasize the fundamental aim of civic education to develop, analyze, implement, and improve approaches, models, access, and ideals of everyone's acting in a democracy as reflective and active co-creators of the worlds in which they live through meaningful and effective engagement in civic life (Levine, 2015). Civic education, understood very generally as educational efforts, practices, and processes that affect people's beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of communities (Crittenden & Levine, 2016), needs a theoretical underpinning that recognizes and situates the transformative dimensions of learning. It requires skills and habits such as critical reflection on basic assumptions and premises that guide one's action on the personal, as well as on the social and political dimensions.

A citizen in a democracy is expected (ideally) to live with a constant effort to critically reflect on oneself, the society, and the world to create more inclusive, more refined, and more discerning perspectives on the world and themselves. These perspectives operate as *frames of references and habits of mind* in order to be able to pursue the democratic way of life and to co-shape and, when necessary, improve/change the democratic society as such. Those citizens can be considered as transformation-oriented or at least open to transformation where necessary—of themselves and of the world(s) in which they act and co-create. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) developed a typology of citizens based of the goals of different civic education programs in the US: personally responsible citizens (who donates food, blood, pay taxes, etc.), participatory citizens (who organize collective action such as food transport), and justice-oriented citizens (who ask for root causes of social injustice and organize themselves in different social movements). We suggest that transformative experience is present throughout all three dimensions and argue that any civic education that ignores transformative dimensions of learning may not be adequate for a genuine democratization for the society. The value of examining civic/citizenship education through the lens of transformative education has many benefits, which we believe can be seen in the collection of articles in this special issue. Not least among these benefits are the skills, habits, and capacities of learners to engage in such processes as critical self-reflection, awareness of multiple perspectives, and reflective and rational discourse with others. Further, there are obvious advantages for engaging in civic communities for learners who become more capable of fostering and enduring deep changes in their own world-perspectives, and of encouraging critical reflection by others.

A prominent theory of transformative education, transformative learning theory, has been criticized for not addressing (enough) its social dimensions. Mezirow (1998) himself rejected this criticism as misunderstanding of his theory. Rooted in humanism and the emancipatory tradition (Freire, Illich), pragmatism (Dewey), and critical theory traditions (Habermas), transformative learning theory is defined by its programmatic commitment to individual growth and social development (Fleming, 2016).

Transformation, according to Mezirow, comes about through a process of critical reflection and discourse ending in reflective action informed by a more rational way of thinking. Discourse, according to Mezirow, contributes to how we justify our beliefs. "We often become critically reflective of our assumptions or those of others and arrive at a transformative insight, but we need to justify our new perspective through discourse" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20). Discourse consists in the giving and taking of reasons—providing support for and defending our beliefs, while also taking the perspective of our dialogue partners. Ideally, participating in discourse of this kind allows us to test and amend our beliefs—rejecting those for which we lack justification. Contemporary social issues that would benefit from such mutually creative and critical processes would be abortion, wealth distribution, the climate crisis, and so forth.

We also think that Mezirow's emphasis on critical self-reflection and communicative discourse echoes the core principles of civic education, namely, commitment to autonomy and human dignity (Kloubert, 2018). As Mezirow noted, assessment of our

beliefs can be made by reference to tradition, submission to authority, using force or manipulation, or by using communicative discourse and deep exchange of thoughts (Mezirow, 2007). Force and submission to tradition or authority contradict the recognition of human dignity and undermine the principle of autonomy of each individual. Civic transformative learning, then, is at odds with such problematic practices as brainwashing, manipulation, and propaganda. We consider the communicative discourse as not only more appropriate but also the more ethical and acceptable catalyst of transformative civic learning.

Learning to critically and reflectively participate in (public) dialogue as well as in collaborative actions was considered as crucial for adult learners (Mezirow, 2007). Mezirow saw the role of adult educators in promoting transformative learning in creating and fostering learning communities in which "people can reflect critically, discourse collaboratively and act collectively" (Mezirow, 2007, p. 17). This community is

> "cemented by empathic solidarity, committed to the social and political practice of participatory democracy, informed through critical reflection, continuously engaged in collaborative discourse and collectively taking reflective action, when necessary, to assure that social systems and local institutions, organizations, and practices are responsive to the human needs of those they serve" (p.17).

The emphasis here on empathy, solidarity, participation, and action with, for, and toward the public suggests that the individualistic critiques of Mezirow and transformative learning might have been misplaced.

Researchers who continued to develop the theory of transformative learning indicate the social dimension, as well. For instance, Cranton (2011) emphasized "an emancipatory perspective," (p. 76) understanding transformative learning as a process of liberating oneself from a prior framework of understanding in order to enlarge one's own horizon of interaction with the world. Schugurensky (2002), describing the emancipatory potential of critical reflection, notices that whether it results in transformation of a comprehensible worldview and even social change depends largely on the context (e.g., supportive social environment, sense of community, and social reality susceptible of transformation). He then opted for twining the fields of civic and transformative education and saw the main challenge in finding "the most appropriate strategies and locations to promote the development of active, socially responsible, democratic and caring citizens who have the competencies to engage in collective decision making" (p. 64).

Similarly, Finnegan argues for the need of searching and creating educational social spaces: *publics* and *counter-publics*. He sees the latter (following Negt and Kluge) as spaces created from "below" in order to confront the dominant power relationships and overcome inequality, subordination, and alienation: "Counter-publics are, in this sense, movements of transformative learning of a particular sort which seek to change political and cultural assumptions" (Finnegan, 2022, p. 26).

O'Sullivan's approach to transformative learning addresses as well the oppressive conditions of our societies (particularly patriarchy, racial dominance, and class structure). He sees the need of transformative education in order to "show how globalizing and 'restructuring' are clearly an impediment to a just society" (O'Sullivan, 1999, p. 166) and suggests that "anti-racist education must define, conceptualize and perceive 'difference' from the standpoint of those who occupy the margins of society and continually have to resist their marginality through collective action" (p. 162).

Some current civic education theorists raise the question of how citizens can be responsible, effective actors in their communities and emphasize the necessity to teach for collective action and social change, for a "civic renewal movement" (Levine, 2015). This renewal movement can be measured by its ability to actually improve the living conditions of people and communities, and to enable people to have relevant and timely learning experiences. Levine sees three components of civic renewal movement as necessary to be successful: deliberation, cooperation, and civic relationship. First, all citizens are involved in a process of public discussion and deliberation about public affairs. But deliberation and rational discourse alone are not enough. What must follow is a civic action, a cooperation by active and committed citizens. However, these two steps require a special kind of relationship, a civic relationship through the sharing of and listening to justifications, reasoning, and frameworks. A civic relationship is defined by several characteristics. First, unlike a deep friendship, or family relationship, it is not exclusive. Participants are seeking to expand and diversify their own relationships. Second, civic relationships are not simply private. For a relationship to be "civic" they must talk, listen, and work on private and public concerns or problems. Third, a civic relationship need not be "civil; it can also contain sharp contradictions, but it still must be based on the recognition of everybody's dignity" (Levine, 2015, p. 56).

The three components of civic movement as defined by Levine echo the components of transformative learning as described by Mezirow:

(1) Critical reflection and rational or, as called by him later, collaborative discourse, which includes "deliberately weighing the evidence, assessing arguments or reasons advanced in support or opposition, examining alternative viewpoints and on critically examining assumptions in order to reach a best judgment on the justification of a belief" (Mezirow, 2007, p. 14).

(2) Action which means active participation in collective community problem solving efforts. "This often requires specialized knowledge and the services of an adult educator experienced in social action education" (p. 16).

(3) The feeling of solidarity and empathy, openness, and feeling of connectedness (Mezirow, 2007). This solidarity is for Mezirow not only "civil" or compromising. For him, in the dialogue it is important "not only to seek a wide range of views but to allow dissension" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 12). Frames of such a dialogue are "Feelings of trust, solidarity, security, and empathy," it is not

about "winning an argument," but "welcoming difference, 'trying on' other points of view, identifying the common in the contradictory" (pp. 12–13).

For any essential social change to occur there is always a need for profound learning at the individual level, including a deep and sustainable perspective transformation (Hoggan, 2016). Transformative learning that also combines approaches of civic education may suggest tools for learners to cope with ever-changing worlds—as co-creators of our societies, focusing on social action, democratization, and societal improvement. Mezirow saw social movements as powerful agencies for transformative learning (Mezirow, 1998). But, as he noted "social movements come and go," but what actually enables social movement is a change in the way of thinking (based on critical reflection and "validating critical understanding through discursive inquiry") and reflective action that "makes social movements and other forms of social practice possible" (Mezirow, 1998, p. 71).

The relationship between individual and social transformation is not unidirectional, but reciprocal. For social change to occur and be sustainable we need individuals' capacity to think critically, to expand and transform their frames of references, and to become better thinkers. But the institutions, societies, and structures influence the likelihood of deep personal transformation.

Contributions of the Special Issue

The contributors to this special issue advance a vision of civic education as transformative education that provides an approach to understanding deep learning and change (Mezirow, 1998). Jayne Fleener and Susan J. Barcinas discuss in their article the possibilities of transformative education to move forward the promise of democracy through futures literacy. The authors call the democratic project that they envision a dynamic democracy capable of changing, improving, and adapting. They see the role of civic transformative learning in addressing uncertainty and complexity and helping adult learners develop skills of adaptability as well as decision making during rapidly changing times. The integration of futures' approaches into the discussion of civic transformative education is presented in the article as a learning concept aimed at developing skills to anticipate and vision of desirable futures through individual and societal transformations.

The article "The Field Immersion Framework: A Transformative Pedagogy for Experiential Civic Education" offers an analysis of a civic engagement practice within higher education from the perspective of transformative learning. Using the typology of learning outcomes as developed by Hoggan (2016), the authors describe each stage of the field Immersion Framework (Foregrounding, Immersion, and Reflection) in their implications on students' civic learning process. The article emphasizes the strengthening of civic agency as a culminating stage of transformative civic education where students see themselves as co-creators of their communities.

Transformative civic education within higher education institutions is also the topic of the next article: "Towards the transformative role of global citizenship education experiences in higher education: Crossing students' and teachers' views." While combining two approaches—that of Global Citizenship Education (GCE) and Transformative Learning—the authors highlight the importance of critical reflection and dialogue. Based on empirical data from the practice of GCE in Portugal, the authors discuss conditions, processes, and outcomes of learning from the perspective of students and teachers, positioning those courses as catalysts for a globally oriented social and personal transformation.

Creating a digital learning environment for transformative democratic education is the topic of the article "Strengthening Democracy through Knowledge Mobilization." Using the example of Participedia (participedia.net), a web-based platform for collaborative co-production of civic knowledge, Landry and von Lieres analyze it as a digital global learning space for reflective, experiential, dialogical, and emancipatory learning. As a countercurrent against democratic apathy and erosion, digital civic learning is conceived as a form of civic participation aimed at profound shifting in one's understanding of political and social processes and one's own role within those transformations.

In the subsequent article, "Roots and Growth: Threading the Ethos of Personal, Social and Political Transformation," the authors develop a theoretical model using transformative, civic, and leadership frameworks—in its threads and roots—to address personal growth and social development. While emphasizing the cultivation of awareness, critical reflexivity, engaged inquiry, shifts in perspective, and informed action, the authors provide an extensive discussion about the possible practical implication of such a civic learning.

The special issue closes with an article on historical examples of impactful civic education that can be described as transformational. Kristi Loberg suggests revisiting the theoretical origin of Highlander Folk School in order to understand its philosophical underpinnings, international inspirations, and historical impacts—and by doing so to reflect on its potentials (and limits) for contemporary civic education.

Conclusion

The continued existence of democracy, which has seemed self-evident and secure in recent memory, is increasingly being discussed in society as requiring protection. Considering increased threats to democracy, particularly internally, there has been renewed interest in approaches and theories that would enable democratic learning and needed social change. Transformative learning and educational practices are of particular value because of their potential relationship to civic education—the modes of learning and teaching capable of inspiring individuals to be more active agents of their relationships and partners in their communities. We hope that the special issue inspires further inquiry into and experimentation with strategies, methods, examples, and the

ethics of civic transformative education. We are very grateful to the editors, authors, and reviewers of the journal for your thoughts, dialogues, and valuable contributions.

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