

# Connecting Transculturalism with Transformative Learning: Toward a New Horizon of Adult Education

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*The impact of transnational migration with activities across transnational borders has reconfigured multiple social and public identities calling for shifting to transculturalism as a theoretical framework in understanding the changing nature of adult education. Transculturalism becomes a mode of being and learning where humans interact with each other in a culturally diverse environment. Integrating different identities and connecting the global with the local, transculturalism is a learning commitment that facilitates socio-cultural adaptation and interaction in a dynamic society recognizing different worldviews. This paper offers a theoretical approach toward transculturalism as transformative learning with a focus on discussions of cultural concepts and connections with perspective transformation. The common ground between transculturalism and transformative learning is the idea of continuum, and interconnection of knowledge, skills and attitudes as an ongoing process of inquiry, thinking, reflecting, and acting. Connecting theories of transculturalism and transformative learning with our new reality of transnational mobility across the world opens new horizons for policies and practices in immigration and adult education.*

*L'impact de la migration transnationale et les activités transfrontalières qui en découlent a reconfiguré de multiples identités sociales et publiques, provoquant ainsi une demande d'adopter le transculturalisme comme cadre théorique pour comprendre l'évolution de l'éducation des adultes. Le transculturalisme devient un mode d'être et d'apprentissage où les humains interagissent dans un milieu culturellement diversifié. Intégrant différentes identités et liant le mondial au local, le transculturalisme est un engagement à l'apprentissage qui facilite l'adaptation et l'interaction socioculturelles dans une société dynamique qui reconnaît la pluralité des visions du monde. Cet article offre une approche théorique qui considère le transculturalisme comme un apprentissage transformationnel axé sur les discussions de concepts et de liens culturels visant une transformation des perspectives. Le terrain commun entre le transculturalisme et l'apprentissage transformationnel est l'idée de continuum et l'interconnexion des connaissances, habiletés et attitudes comme processus continu d'enquête, de réflexion et d'actions. Le fait de lier les théories du transculturalisme et de l'apprentissage transformationnel à notre nouvelle réalité de mobilité transnationale de par le monde ouvre de nouveaux horizons aux politiques et aux pratiques touchant l'immigration et l'éducation des adultes.*

Migration takes many forms depending on, among other factors, whether the moving subject is a highly qualified professional, a manual worker, an entrepreneur, a refugee, or if the impetus

for migration is family reunification. Global inequality means that migration tends to flow from less developed nations to advanced industrial countries, toward OECD member nations. According to the recent OECD annual report (OECD, 2016), some of the most salient features of today's migration trends in OECD countries include the following. First, migration of both permanent and temporary migrants from outside the OECD to OECD countries continues to rise. In 2015, permanent migration increased to 4.8 million, slightly above the 2007 peak level and 10% more than in 2014. Asylum seeking in OECD countries reached an historical high in 2015 at 1.65 million, doubling the 2014 level. Second, migrants from Eastern Europe and Asia continue to dominate. Over the period 2004-2014, China (9.3%), Romania (6.3%), Poland (5.1%), India (4.4%), and the Philippines (2.6%) remain the top five source countries sending new migrants to OECD countries. Third, the migration of highly skilled workers has increased during the past two decades but is becoming more selective in some countries. As a result of growing migration, the foreign-born population of OECD countries as a whole reached 13% of the total population in 2014 (OECD, 2016).

Another distinctive feature of contemporary migration is the shift from inter-national to trans-national as "multiple, circular, and return migrations, rather than a singular great journey from one sedentary space to another, occur across transnational spaces" (Lie, 1995, p. 304). As Lie notes, "transnationalism" makes it possible for imagined diaspora communities to subvert old conceptions of unidirectional migrant passage and replace them with understandings centered on images of unending sojourn across different lands. In this view, transnational migration is often used to describe the multiple and circular migration across transnational spaces of migrants who maintain close contact with their countries of origin (Guo, 2010, 2015a). As such, migrants can no longer be characterized as "uprooted": people who are expected to make a sharp and definitive break from their homelands (Glick Schiller, Basch, & Szanton-Blanc, 1995). Instead, their daily lives depend on "multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" (Glick Schiller et al., 1995, p. 48). In this view, migrants are no longer perceived to be obliged to remain tied to or locatable in a "given," unitary culture (Grosu, 2012). Rather, they are seen as embedded within a shifting field of increasingly transcultural identities (Kraidy, 2005). These new paradigms of migration have led to the emergence of new research protocols put together to explore the impact of transnational migration on the identity, culture, and integration of migrant populations spanning several nations simultaneously (Guo, 2016; Guo & Maitra, 2017).

The transnational concepts of multiple ties, interactions, and linkages across the borders and in multi-faceted locations lead to the phenomenon of transculturalism as a dynamic perspective of understanding cultures. Unfortunately, there is very little research in adult education recognizing transculturalism as a new model in the study of cultures that no longer isolates one from another. In this article, we propose transculturalism as a learning commitment that focuses on examining and promoting paths for successful interaction and active participation in a transnational learning environment. More specifically, we explore the theoretical concepts of transculturalism as a new mode of transformative learning. First, we outline transculturalism as the theoretical framework of this examination and the holistic concept of interpreting culture. Next, we analyze transformative learning theory in a transnational and transcultural context. Then, we link the core elements of transculturalism with transformative learning to explore possibilities of transcultural learning. Finally, we end the discussion with implications for adult education.

## **Theorizing Transculturalism**

### **Understanding Culture in a Holistic Context**

We start by examining the concept of culture in a holistic multidimensional context, as it provides a lens through which we communicate, interact, and position ourselves. Culture is also a central concept in understanding transculturalism and transformative learning where individuals learn who they are, how they construct meaning, and how they grow and develop, interacting with others socially and culturally. For centuries scholars and philosophers have captured the essence of culture identifying characteristics from different perspectives that shape this elusive phenomenon. Proposing an interpretive approach to the study of culture, Geertz (1973) speaks about culture as “a pattern of meanings, a system of conceptions” (p. 144); a “web of significance” (p. 5); and a set, a vast geometry, a cosmos, a stratified hierarchy, a structure, a frame. In terms of Geertz’s definition of culture, meanings are the inherited conception that symbolic forms express and embrace knowledge about attitudes toward life. His holistic approach to culture is not a simple unity, if it is a web, it is not a “seamless web” (p. 407); each culture contains within it the elements of its own negation. He does not see the need of culture as a system to be “exhaustively interconnected” nor as “unabridged discontinuities” (Geertz, 1973, p. 407); cultural discontinuity or cultural integration are realistic results even in highly stable societies. Indeed, Geertz does not narrow culture in geographical borders but rather as a system of patterns, culture as a whole where different levels of interaction between cultures are possible, driven by a range of forces: mass-media, movement of cuisines, dress, people, translation of languages, and art motives. Similarly, the pluralistic view of culture and an individual as a product of multiple cultural realities is further developed by Trice and Beyer (1993) who view cultures as collective, emotional, historical, symbolic, dynamic, and fuzzy.

Culture today is inextricably linked to community, national and transnational economies, and politics. Culture in this multidimensional and dynamic context is driven by different forces (Geertz, 1973) that incorporate contradictions (Trice & Beyer, 1993). American scholar George Yudice (2003) defines culture in the 21st century as a resource that we need to learn, know, and consider. Influenced by transnational movements, culture is emphasized as a resource for economic and political exploration, agency, and power which is mobilized and instrumentalized for a wide range of purposes and ends (Sorrells, 2014). Such a concept includes the overlapping of local and global, tradition and modernity, spirituality and materiality, the rapid spread of knowledge, and the limitations of our human capacity to cope with this (Wulf, 2010). Considering the dynamics of cultures, Wulf suggests that “in order to be able to deal competently with cultural diversity in transnational reality, we need to experience the other” as “cultures and individuals are formed through exchange with each other” (p. 38). Taking further the concept that “societies and cultures are constituted by contact with alterity,” Wulf defines the mission of transcultural education as holistic development through open and ethical interaction with others and with experiencing alterity.

Understanding culture in a holistic multidimensional context, through experiencing alterity and crossing borders that often are hard to trace, leads to a transcultural learning that should focus on how learners and educators are both products and producers of cultures (Aldridge, Kilgo, & Christensen, 2014). As producers of culture, individuals living in transnational “habitus” transcend culture and create something new—their own creative journey—the hero’s

journey that Joseph Campbell (2004/1949) describes in his book, *A Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Referred to as the call to adventure, Campbell believes this adventure is universal, the hero must go out into the world to find his or her own way, but also has a moral obligation to bring something to the society and culture as a whole. These cultural concepts provide a foundation for broadening and deepening transcultural learning and perspective transformation.

### **The Transcultural Model**

The transcultural model as a new way of seeing the world, and thus, of understanding ourselves (Slimbach, 2005) expands the interdisciplinary field of study as new cultural and ethnic boundaries have emerged in a transnational reality that fosters transcultural attitudes, cultural interactions, meaning making, and power formation (Brooks, 2007; Cuccioletta, 2001/2002; Kraidy, 2005; Lewis, 2002). Michail Bakhtin (1981) used transculture to understand “the Western postmodern condition” by resolving the contradiction between “multiculturalism’s push for communal identities and deconstruction’s imperative to excavate internal differences in identity” (Berry & Epstein, 1999, p. 79). Epstein (2009) describes the transcultural model of cultural development not as “leveling globalism and isolating pluralism” but as “a next level of liberation” (p. 328). He takes further the notion of transcending cultures across the traditional borders of culture stating that this is the “most precious” freedom and also the “most neglected”: “the freedom from one’s own culture, in which one was born and educated” (p. 330). Likewise, Slimbach (2005) argues that transculture can be tested by means of thinking “outside the box of one’s motherland” and by “seeing many sides of every question without abandoning conviction and allowing for a chameleon sense of self without losing one’s cultural center” (p. 211).

For example, in the context of transnational migration in Canada and many other countries, more individuals find themselves outside of their native ethnic, racial, sexual, ideological, and other cultural limitations without abandoning their inborn culture, traditions, and customs. According to Epstein (2012), the elements of transculture are freely chosen by people rather than dictated by rules and prescriptions within their given culture. He compares this process with the way how artists choose colours creatively in their paintings: “[T]ransculture offers a universal palette on which any individual can blend colours to produce an expressive self-portrait” (p. 62). Thus, a transcultural person can adhere to any ethnic or confessional tradition and decide the degree to which this becomes part of one’s own identity. To describe this transcultural condition that gives a new meaning to all elements of existing cultures, Epstein steps on Bakhtin’s concept of “outsidedness” (in Russian—“vnenakhodimost”) or “being located beyond.”

Bakhtin’s concept suggests that individuals can adequately understand and describe a certain culture only if they distance themselves from it. A person cannot fully visualize his or her own face; only others can see the person’s real appearance from their location beyond those personal boundaries. This is what happens with immigrants in Canada; they see their own culture through different lenses and start understanding some traditions that they never questioned before. In addition, they can describe Canadian culture in more detail than Canadian born individuals. Consciously cognized transcultural differences develop cultural awareness, self-confidence and recognition, understanding of new positionality, and reintegration of new perspectives and roles, which are those different stages of transformative learning described by Mezirow (2009). Moreover, transculture can be perceived as encompassing and creating space

for individual's transformative learning: attitudes and abilities that facilitate open and ethical interaction with people across cultures (Slimbach, 2005).

Indeed, transculture is a continuum, encompassing all cultures, the gaps and blank spaces between them: the elements that comprise the semantic of the prefix *trans*. *Trans* brings the notion of dynamics, moving through space across the border (Kraidy, 2005), expanding the limits beyond a single identity, switching between cultures and languages as a mode of being, and having a sense of continuum, discourse, and transformation (Berry & Epstein, 1999; Epstein, 2012). Often, cultural scholars use prefixes *inter* and *trans* interchangeably referring to inter- or transcultural knowledge, attitude, skills, and behaviours. According to dictionary definitions, *inter* means between, among, mutually, reciprocally, together, versus *trans*, meaning across, beyond, through. The prefix *inter* suggests more static and restricted space where individuals with different cultural backgrounds interact between each other mixing, adapting, excluding, or integrating in a dominant cultural environment. In contrast, having a more dynamic meaning, *trans* comprises stabilizing or destabilizing effect, social conjunction, historical conditions, integration or disintegration of groups, cultures, and power. Drawing from this dynamic and dialectic notion of transculturalism, the next sections discuss transformative learning theory and potential connections with core elements of transcultural learning.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

Built on the foundational concepts of constructivist assumptions, humanism, and critical social theory, Mezirow (2012) defined transformative learning as a process “by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference ... to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (p. 75). He identifies ten phases of learning that become clarified in the transformative process:

1. Disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition of a connection between one's discontent and the process of transformation
5. Exploration of opinions for new roles, relationships and action
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquainting knowledge and skills for interpreting one's plan
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 2009, p. 19)

In Mezirow's theory, the elements of critical reflection and dialogue lead to a transformed frame of reference resulting in individual and social change. Frames of reference are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions. It is the revision of a frame of reference are concerns with reflection on experience that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation. A perspective transformation leads to a “more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference...one that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1996, p. 163). A perspective

transformation often occurs either through series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes or as a result of an acute personal or social crisis. Learning occurs in one of four ways: by elaborating existing meaning schemes, learning new meaning schemes, transforming meaning schemes, and transforming meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 2009).

Over the years, since Mezirow's seminal work was published, the critique and debates have focused on different aspects of transformative theory and have modified the original concept around two major frameworks: Gunnlaugson (2008) describes them as "first wave" and "second wave" theories of transformative learning; the first wave being those works that build on critique, or departed from Mezirow's seminal work, and the second wave including authors who worked towards integrative, holistic, and integral perspectives. In this article, we consider the second wave as more interrelated to the concept of transculturalism including theorists such as Patricia Cranton, Laurent Daloz, John Dirkx, Edmund O'Sullivan, and Edward Taylor. For example, Dirkx (2012) sees transformative learning as emotional "soul work." He examines the powerful role that emotions, images, and feelings can play in transformative learning to construct meaning, make sense of day-to-day events, refer to the self and outer, and mediate dialogue and relationships. Dirkx (2012) also states that "soul work" is not meant to replace the analytical, rational, and reflective processes of transformative learning; "[r]ather it is intended to provide a more holistic and integrated way of framing the meaning-making that occurs in contemporary contexts for adult learning" (p.127). Another theorist, Charaniya (2012), draws from spirituality and culture, and explores what it means to engage in cultural-spiritual transformations. She sees a three-part process that begins when someone's cultural or spiritual experience is challenged by contradiction of beliefs and practice, and then is expanded through engagement with experiences that are intellectual, relational, and reflective; and finally, the culmination is more understanding of self. According to Charaniya, the process is not limited to rational discourse but relies heavily on engaging dialogue, sharing stories, exploring symbols, and learning from each other, resulting in changing one's cultural and spiritual identity, how one sees the world, and his or her role there. More expansive vision of transformative learning in planetary context is presented by O'Sullivan (1999, 2001, 2012). His idea of integral human development must be understood as a dynamic wholeness that encompasses dialectical movement of both harmony and disharmony. O'Sullivan's model is generative and open-ended including personal, community, and planetary development, connecting local to global. He encourages the need of diversity within and between communities, and inclusion is an imperative for transformative education. Although the preceding models interpret transformative learning differently, all highlight the need of transformative narrative in broader contexts and approaches, beyond the limitations of singular culture, and thus, they coincide with the concept of transculturalism described earlier.

Separately and far from this scholarship circle, in 1949, the American scholar Joseph Campbell in his book, *The Hero with Thousand Faces*, developed the transformative model of the archetypal hero's journey. In different cultures around the world, Campbell found a common pattern for a hero's journey: A hero with special power is called to adventure, receives a supernatural aid, crosses a threshold, travels a road of trials, encounters a goddess, experiences an apotheosis, and returns with elixir—being transformed and with power to transform the world. Campbell argues that all myths deal with transformations of consciousness: "[Y]ou have been thinking one way; you now have to think a different way" (Campbell & Moyers, 1988, p. 127). The journey, according to Campbell (2004/1949), requires a separation from the familiar, known world, an initiation into a new level of awareness, skills and responsibilities, and a return

home matured, enriched with new experience, achieved goals, and mastered skills. Drawing from mythology, Campbell describes the first stage of the hero's journey as "a call to adventure": transferring the spiritual centre of gravity from within the society to a zone of unknown, a zone where a transcultural learner adequately understands and describes certain culture as an outsider, beyond personal boundaries (Epstein, 2009). Furthermore, this is the disorienting dilemma, where the transformation starts (Mezirow, 2009), that requires losing oneself and giving oneself to some higher end. Campbell offers hope that the consciousness of the individual entering and transforming one's personal life and "psyche," one's surrounding culture, the life of one's family, one's relational work, and other matters of life can be transformed too. This supports the dialectic notion of transcultural learning (Slimbach, 2005) where the individual's transformation is interconnected with the social as a journey through the personal, cosmological, and equally vast spiritual realities in relation to society (Campbell, 2004/1949).

The result of the miraculous passage and return of the hero is the freedom to live consciously and peacefully "having reconciled individual consciousness with the universal will" (Campbell, 2004/1949, p. 221). In transculturalism, this is when an individual is reaching the level of liberation, self-deconstruction, and self-transformation in "the transcendental realm that relates to all existing cultures as they relate to nature" (Epstein, 2009, p. 335). In the context of transformative theory, it rests upon the last two phases defined by Mezirow (2009): self-confidence in new roles and relationships and transformed meaning perspective. For Slimbach (2005), at the end of transcultural journey, the learner is open to "the good, the true, the beautiful in each person and cultural tradition" having "a universal attitude capable of gathering up any trait, any truth, any teaching—in any culture—and then of assimilating that into a more global character" (p. 224). Similarly, this is the integral transformation (O'Sullivan, 1999) where "humans perceive themselves as a mode of being of the universe as well as distinctive being in the universe" (p. 215) and discover their identity and roles in planetary and community aspects. In the next section, we will explore how the core elements of transcultural learning can be incorporated into transformative learning theory for perspective transformation in a global context of transnational movements across social spaces.

## **Linking Transculturalism with Transformative Learning**

### **Transcultural Learning<sup>1</sup>**

In his essay, "Transcultural Journey," Slimbach (2005) proposes a cognitive "map" of developing transcultural learning including six broad categories such as 1) perspective consciousness, 2) ethnographic skills, 3) global awareness, 4) world learning, 5) foreign language proficiency, and 6) affective development. His approach to transcultural learning borrows heavily from existing research in intercultural communication, social anthropology, and international education. What is the innovative part of his model is the recommendation to learners and educators to move beyond the traditional classrooms and structured presentations to the community: engaging oneself in fieldwork, in a real space that is immersed, immediate, and emotional. Slimbach argues that this model of education will invite learners to bring their knowledge within their own culture to the process of creating and cultivating relationships and interactions across cultures. The experience of doing so creates opportunities for acquiring a set of personal attitudes, social sensitivities, and intellectual skills—all the elements of transcultural learning that rarely can be attained in a regular classroom.

The first proposition in Slimbach's attainable ideal of a transcultural person suggests "developing the ability to question constantly the source of one's cultural assumptions and ethical judgment, leading to the habit of seeing things through the minds and hearts of others" (Slimbach, 2005, p. 206). From this fundamental egalitarian acknowledgment, individuals start to discover and expand the range of alternative values, visions, and ways that others make sense of the world. The recommendations do not dismiss the boundaries of self-identity and the fact that "we exist as part of multiple intersecting microcultures" (Slimbach, 2005, p. 211). Transcultural learners can be able to move in and out of daily context being aware of transnational conditions and systems, nationalities, gender, classes, languages, races, religions, and ideologies that coexist in a transnational world with intense economic, political, and cultural changes. Demonstrating knowledge and awareness of one's own culture reactions, behaviour, language, and that of the host society are needed competencies to succeed in the transcultural journey. It also requires readiness to recognize the true and the good in each culture that can nourish more universal virtues and values. Demonstrating humility, respect, and a genuine interest towards diverse others, learners should understand that movement "outside the box" is not natural; ethnocentrism is an existential condition. Instead, this is a primary goal of a transcultural journey: to open the reality outside ourselves, to discover that others exist, to dare question our own prejudices, to accept others without comparing or judging them against ourselves, to progress from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism.

History proves that the conflicts between groups result, to a large extent, from social and cultural disregard. Myriad examples illustrate conflicts in our society because of given group identity ascribed by birth (i.e., ethnicity, religion, race) and chosen as terminal that marginalize minority groups within the national culture and distribute unequal power and representation. To avoid such clashes, Slimbach (2005) suggests transcultural learners articulate historical conditions, by which particular groups have become underrepresented in the society, demonstrating awareness to resist oppression, and ability to reflect on others' culture, history, and present-day circumstances.

However, this egalitarian and humanistic universal approach cannot dismiss social and economic polarization and inequality. This is what Slimbach calls the capacity to "put oneself in another's shoes," to apprehend their point of view, taking responsibility as transcultural citizens of the global community. Here is the challenge of transculturalism: to move from local to global, from national to transnational, not trying to change or "turn away" from the other, but "to cross over," "enlarged self in relation to one's own culture, and that third culture that eventually forms on the boundary between two" (Slimbach, 2005, p. 220). Slimbach's cognitive map is related to Wulf's (2010) concept of experiencing alterity and to the transcultural journey that transforms the learner to a new self. In particular, transcultural learning dimensions clearly relate to the transformative theory of Mezirow and the archetypal "hero's journey" (Campbell, 2004/1949) which was discussed in the previous section.

### **Transculturalism as Transformative Learning**

Transnational migratory processes require that we consider the continuity and ties of multiple communities, positions and interpretations, and the connections and disjuncture between the local and the global. An ability to connect the local with the global reflects on the dynamics of transformative learning (O'Sullivan, 1999, 2012) that involves individual as well as social transformation and recognizing individual experience, critical reflection, and dialogue (Taylor,



2009). For example, without individual experience, there is nothing to engage with in critical reflection. Similarly, developing an authentic practice is significant for fostering trusting relationships respectfully between members of the group, community, or organization. As such, an authentic practice often provides a safe and inclusive environment to engage in dialogue and in critical reflection, ultimately allowing transformative learning to take place. Furthermore, engaging emotions and imaginations provide an opportunity for establishing a productive dialogue with those unconscious aspects of ourselves, addressing the sociocultural dynamics of the individual and the group in the learning process (Dirkx, 2006). The supreme moment of inquiry and self-reflection for O'Sullivan (2001) is when individuals themselves articulate a new appreciation of their cosmic identity. As the study of transformative learning has evolved, other elements have emerged as equally significant: a holistic orientation, awareness of context, and an authentic relationship (O'Sullivan, 2001, 2012; Dirkx, 2006; Taylor, 2009). It also means using different approaches and expressive ways (e.g., narratives, myths, rituals, music, images) to create a holistic learning environment conducive to whole-person learning, and modeling empathetic connections and relationships to sense making. The task of relatedness is a primary concern for O'Sullivan (2001); we as humans need to extend our capacity to develop "bonded relationships through human interaction" and "participatory relationship with the deep power of the universe" (p. 224).

These core elements of transformative learning can be recognized in intercultural praxis that Sorrells (2014) outlines as "a process of critical, reflective, engaged thinking and acting that enables us to navigate the complex, contradictory, and challenging intercultural space we inhabit interpersonally, communally, and globally" (p. 153). Although she calls the process intercultural praxis, we argue that the meaning and its six entry-points (inquiry, framing, positionality, dialogue, reflection, and action) is analogous to the precepts of transculturalism and transformative learning.

Inquiry, according to Sorrells (2014), is a desire and willingness to know, to ask, to find out, and to learn more about those who are different from ourselves. The practice of inquiry leads to engagement with others, seeking to understand their point of view, especially if it challenges our own worldview. In transcultural notion, inquiry is exploring universal and unique human experiences and potential, and discovering the ways that others make sense of the world (Slimbach, 2005; Wulf, 2010; Epstein, 2012). Likewise, this is the notion of experience in transformative learning: prior learners' experience and what they learn about themselves and the world when they participate in learning activities. It is important to consider prior life experience and the unique cultural background of learners because, very often, this fosters transformative learning: e.g., women who returned to school to prepare for a job (Mezirow & Marsick, 1978), students and educators who traveled abroad (Taylor, 1994; Polyzoi & Magro, 2015), refugees who experienced war, and pre- and post-migration factors for newcomers (Magro & Polyzoi, 2009; Magro & Ghorayshi, 2011). For example, mentor-mentee engagement between a newcomer and a local professional can be described as a form of inquiry to find and understand different views and behaviours, as well as different experiences. Dirkx (2012) and O'Sullivan (2001) also consider self-inquiry and collective inquiry through storytelling, rituals, and spirituality.

Whereas participants engage in experiential activities and interact with sharing their stories, emotions, and feelings (Dirkx, 2001, 2008; Taylor, 2009); this makes them aware of the frame of reference from which they see the world. In Sorrells' (2014) concept, this is framing: how things are seen through individual, cultural, national, and regional frames or lenses that include

some or exclude others. Framing is a knowledge construction across cultural dimensions, time, and space. Consequently, in transculturalism, framing is distancing from one culture in order to understand it, transcend its boundaries, experience alterity, and take another look through different lenses (Epstein, 2009; Wulf, 2010). Additional aspect of framing is the capacity of flexibly and consciously shifted perspectives from the particular, situated dimensions to the broader dimensions and from global to particular dimensions, while maintaining awareness of and attention to both sets of frames (Sorrells, 2014). In transformative learning, for example, O'Sullivan (2001) highlights the importance of dynamics of shifting, multiple expressions, and dimensions as planetary citizens.

Positionality is a place from which to view and make sense of the world around us. Assuming socially constructed hierarchy based on race, ethnicity, class, gender, nationality, religion, age, and physical abilities among others, position individuals socially, geographically, politically, symbolically, and materially in relations to each other, to structures, and configuration of power. Positionality may shift, change, and vary, sometime even drastically, creating a negative effect. For example, when transnational migrants arrive in a new country, many of them experience the triple glass effect consisting of a glass gate, glass door, and glass ceiling, which may converge to create multiple structural barriers affecting migrants' new working lives at different stages of their integration and transition processes (Guo, 2013, 2015b). As a result, internationally educated professionals with high social position status in their home country may find themselves positioned to a minority group, experiencing devaluation, deskilling, and downward social mobility.

Positioning ourselves allows us to question our knowledge: how cultural categories (e.g., race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, etc.) socially and hierarchically construct and produce our knowledge in relation to power. O'Sullivan (1999) calls for deconstructing the dominant culture that produces privilege and power and constitutes racism, sexism, marginalization, dominant states, and institutions that threaten diversity. Therefore, developing an awareness of context, the core value of transformative learning (Taylor, 2009), is understanding of socio-cultural factors (e.g., poverty, gender, material conditions, refugees' trauma and war experience, global conflicts) and further fostering transformative learning to create an inclusive safe learning environment. However, O'Sullivan (2001) and Gorski (2008) argue that achieving this in the era of globalization with its dominant hegemony might be very challenging for educators to prevail against the social hierarchy and inequitable distribution of power. Therefore, we argue that transcultural competence should be part of educators' preparation and professional development.

Differences in power and positionality are evident when one engages in a dialogue from the transformative or transcultural perspective. The process of dialogue invites participants to imagine, experience, and engage creatively with points of view, ways of thinking, being, doing, and beliefs, different from one's own, and accept that they may not fully understand or may not come to a common agreement or position (Sorrells, 2014). From a transcultural perspective, in dialogue, participants gain knowledge and skills, stretching across differences that allow for creative and new understanding of self and others which is the most valuable outcome. In transformative learning, dialogue is used "when we have reason to question the comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness (in relation to norms) or authenticity (in relation to feelings) of what is being asserted, or to question the credibility of the person making the statement" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 77). Other researchers reveal that dialogue helps identify the learner's "edge of meaning making" and "transitional zone of knowing" (Berger, 2004, p. 338),

leads to consensual validation (Baumgartner, 2002), and raise awareness of learners' attitudes, feelings, personality (Mezirow, 2000). Hence dialogue becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action where experience is reflected upon, assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and habits of mind are ultimately transformed (Taylor, 2009).

In order to initiate, maintain, and sustain dialogue in transcultural and transformative learning domain, reflection is a key feature. Reflection is what informs transformative learning across micro and macro levels, considers unique cultural frames of references, and recognizes our own and others' positioning. Reflection enables us to act in the world in meaningful, effective, and socially responsive ways. Freire (1998) also recognizes the reflective dialogue as an essential component of both learning and knowing. As he observes, by disengaging from the taken-for-granted and non-reflexive flow of everyday action, knowledge systems, and value commitments, reflection allows one to re-position and to re-frame what may well be oppressive conditions or relations to power.

The common ground between transculturalism and transformative learning is the idea of continuum: an on-going process of thinking, reflecting, and acting. This is the interconnection of knowledge, attitudes, and skills, and responsible and liberatory action to make a difference in the world—to create a more socially just, equitable, inclusive, and peaceful world. A world, where each person takes multiple and varied actions individually and collectively. An action informed by inquiry, framing, positionality, dialogue, and reflection that can be the catalyst for social justice, transformation, and inclusion. Transcultural learning as perspective transformation allows individuals located at the crossroads of cultures to switch between cultures as a mode of being in the world, as a quest for inclusion while considering common values, oppositions, tensions, and power in interactions.

### **Conclusion: Toward a New Horizon of Adult Education**

Ideally, the process of transcultural development results in a perspective transformation: learning and developing awareness about unfamiliar cultural contexts, accepting and negotiating different values and behaviours in order to communicate and interact competently in a culturally diverse environment. Integrating different identities and connecting the global with the local, transculturalism functions as a form of transformative learning that facilitates socio-cultural adaptation and interaction in a dynamic society that recognizes different worldviews. Its goal is to promote voluntary pluralism, global citizenship, and belonging by integrating different identities that relate to more than one ethnicity and culture. This is not an easy and natural process that “entails negotiation, compromise, stalling, backsliding, self-deception, and failure” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 171). Transformative learning represents a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world and our relationships with other humans (O’Sullivan, Morrell, & Conner, 2002), which is challenging in the context of a dominant educational paradigm. What we are proposing in this article is a transcultural model of transformative learning that opens new perspectives of successful interaction and active participation in a transcultural learning environment.

As our populations grow more diverse, it is imperative for adult education to continue its long-standing commitment to diversity and social justice by working toward a more inclusive adult education environment. Moreover, the current trends in transnational migration call for expanding our learning horizons as adult educators and learners beyond national standardizing learning approach and monocultural dominance. Implementing the holistic and dynamic

perspectives of transcultural learning becomes imperative for future humankind. Ultimately, transcultural learning for sustainability is oriented toward values of peace, social justice, and recognition of individuals as product and producers of transculturalism.

Similarly, the transcultural model of transformative learning also has important implications for higher education as Canadian universities and colleges are becoming increasingly ethno-culturally diverse as a result of growing immigration and increasing enrolment of international students. Minority and international students bring their culture, values, language, and educational background to our campuses, adding to and enriching our educational environment. To build an inclusive education, including teaching and learning, the duty of higher education is to employ methodological pluralism and transcultural model of teaching and learning, to transform prevailing epistemic assumptions, and to liberate human and social development in the future pursuit of inclusive responsible life (Bawden, 2008; Sterling, 2010-2011). Creating a space for inquiry, dialogue, reflection, and action, the core elements of transcultural and transformative learning process, will lead toward achieving the goal of sustainability in education, described by Moore (2005) as “interdisciplinary, collaborative, experiential, and potentially transformative” (p.78). Herein is the radical role of educators and learners to create space in the classrooms where they are collaborators of knowledge and co-learners instead of being labeled as experts and non-experts or divided by the power and authority. However, changing the position of power, shifting perspectives, and experiencing transformation might cause discomfort for both learners and educators. Therefore, teachers and learners have to be prepared for this type of transformation. To this end, the transcultural model of transformative learning offers a theoretical approach toward transcultural learning which opens new horizons for policies, teaching, and practices of adult and higher education in the age of transnational migration.

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### Note

<sup>1</sup> Transcultural education overlaps with other terms, such as multicultural education, cross-cultural education, intercultural education. It is beyond the scope of this article to compare and contrast their similarities and differences. We chose transcultural education because it presents a dynamic perspective of understanding cultures informed by transnational concepts of multiple ties, identities, interactions, and linkages across the borders and in multi-faceted locations. It functions as a form of transformative learning that facilitates socio-cultural adaptation and interaction in a dynamic society recognizing different worldviews.

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