

Adult and Family Literacy Today

Updates on adult and family literacy research, policy, and practice

Volume 11: December 19, 2023

*Best wishes for a joyful holiday season
and a Happy New Year!*

Research to Practice

Using Transformative Learning Theory in the Adult Education Classroom



Is it socially acceptable for adults to go back to school at a later stage in life? Is acceptance consistent across different cultures? What are the internal and external barriers that may challenge this decision? Are these obstacles the same across genders, or do women face different challenges when pursuing their education after having a baby or getting married?

Life's experiences and challenges require us not only to build new competencies, but also examine the way we look at ourselves and our relationships. Mezirow (1978) calls this becoming critically aware of one's perspectives "perspective transformation" (p. 109). He underscores that it is a priority for adult education to "facilitate and reinforce it, as well as to implement resulting action plans." Inspired by his wife's decision to go back to college after their marriage, Mezirow investigated this social phenomenon. In his essay "[Perspective Transformation](#)," he reflects on other educational experiences, such as the literacy campaigns in Latin America championed by Paulo Freire, highlighting their impact in promoting a radical attitude shift in the learners.

Throughout our lives, we experience various phases of transformation that help us restructure our way of thinking and understanding the world around us. Education can serve as an effective catalyst to promote critical thinking by challenging our previous beliefs. According to Mezirow (1978), to achieve this, we need to focus on both logical and emotional types of understanding. This is where **Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)** comes in, by working on both instrumental learning, or task-oriented problem-solving; and communicative learning, which is how people communicate their feelings, needs, and desires.

As adult education teachers, it is important to be aware of the implications of TLT and apply them in the classroom. Consider the arrangement of your classroom as an example. A U-shape seating arrangement can create a feeling of inclusiveness and facilitate open communication between individuals. Additionally, it is important that lessons are designed with the student in mind and encourage critical thinking to explore diverse perspectives and opinions. This can be achieved by creating opportunities for discussion that weigh the pros and cons of different viewpoints. For instance, teachers can present students with contrasting simple articles on a topic and ask for their thoughts and insights on the different elements of each one. This methodology helps students question their own understanding and integrate new perspectives.

Applying Transformative Learning in the Classroom

Create a Supportive Learning Environment: Adult students bring diverse experiences, and fostering open communication and mutual respect can pave the way for transformative change.

Identify Disorienting Dilemmas: Teachers can design activities or guide discussions that prompt critical reflection, encouraging learners to recognize, question and reevaluate their perspectives. Coming from a different culture, the concept of time, daily routines, and food habits for example, could be topics for writing and cultural reflection.

Encourage Reflective Practices: Reflective practices, such as simple journaling, group discussions, and personal narratives, can facilitate self-examination. These practices empower learners to explore their values, beliefs, and assumptions about literacy, education, and family dynamics. One example could be discussing body language and social distance in different cultures. Excerpts from the [Ted Talk "Amy Cuddy - Your body language shapes who you are"](#) could be a good springboard for discussion.

Facilitate Critical Dialogue: Open and respectful dialogue is essential in TLT. Teachers can create opportunities for students to share their perspectives and listen to others' experiences, fostering an environment where diverse viewpoints are valued. One activity could circle around personal narratives. [The Story Corps website](#), for example, offers many different life stories both in audio and written format.

Integrate Real-World Applications: Linking literacy skills to real-world applications enhances the transformative learning experience. Connecting education to practical scenarios, such as navigating healthcare systems or understanding legal documents, makes learning more meaningful and applicable to daily life.

Build Community Partnerships: Collaboration with community organizations, workshops, guest speakers, and field trips organized in partnership with these organizations provide additional resources, broadening the transformative learning experience.

Literacy Around the World



How Lifelong Learning Helped Pat Believe in Himself

On his first day of school, Pat Fitzsimons from Dublin, Ireland, was bullied. From that moment on, he did not like school. He struggled through it until he could finally leave at the age of 15, lacking even basic skills.

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Launch of Family Literacy and Learning Course in Pashto

Afghanistan faces one of the world's lowest youth and adult literacy rates – a consequence of four decades of conflict, natural disasters and poverty that has profoundly impacted the country's education system. Millions of Afghans, particularly women and girls, are unable to access literacy and adult learning opportunities. In response to this, the [UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning \(UIL\)](#) and the [UNESCO Kabul Office](#) have launched an online family intergenerational literacy and learning (FILL) course for Pashto-speaking Afghan parents.

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Resources



Teaching Toolbox: NCFL Guidance and Webinar Highlights

Unleash the potential of your teaching toolkit with valuable resources from the National Center for Families Learning (NCFL) [lesson plans](#). Also, equip yourself with innovative strategies and fresh perspectives to inspire and engage learners on a whole new level by exploring the insightful [Webinar Series](#).



Read Aloud, Bond Strong: Family Literacy Tips

Discover the power of reading aloud in shaping young minds and strengthening family ties. Explore insights and expert advice in this [NPR article](#): 'Reading Aloud Benefits Children's Literacy.' Uncover the transformative impact of shared stories on your child's development and a lifelong love for reading.

A New Resource Book Series: “In Community, Strength: Changing Our Minds about Adult Foundational Education (AFL)”

Delving into the development of basic skills for adults, youth, and children in the United States and other countries, Dr. Paul Jurmo has written a resource book series on a variety of important topics in Adult Foundational Education. You can download the entire resource book series and explore a wealth of insights and information on adult basic education [on his website](#).



What's New at the Institutes?

We Are Hiring!

The Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy and the Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy **are seeking a dynamic Co-Director** to lead the Institutes' administration and day-to-day management and support research and evaluation projects. This position offers great flexibility in pursuing and managing direct service programming and professional development, research, and evaluation projects consistent with the Institutes' missions. It also provides the opportunity to engage in meaningful, rewarding work such as influencing adult basic education and family literacy practice, research, and policy at local, state, national, and international scales. With a current staff of 19, the Institutes are known for a collegial, supportive workplace culture and the high quality of our work in adult basic education and literacy, adult English as a Second Language, family literacy, and workforce education. The Co-Director will become part of an intellectually stimulating environment with access to the resources of a top-tier, public research university.

Read more details and submit application materials [here](#). Applications received by **January 15, 2024**, are assured full consideration; however, applications will be received until the position is filled.

Questions about the position can be directed to:

Dr. Esther Prins

GI/ISAL Co-Director Search Chair

c/o Dmi Myers (dak291@psu.edu)

Meet our Newest Team Member

Alexis Vang holds a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and a Master's in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Over the last nine years, she has worked in adult education in urban, suburban, and virtual educational settings



both in and outside of the United States. Each position has provided Alexis with opportunities to help others meet their potential and achieve their educational and career goals. As a child of two refugees from the Vietnam War, she also has a strong passion for supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion within adult education and beyond. In her new role as a Workforce Development Specialist with the WDSL project, Alexis will share her expertise in career counseling, supporting English language learners, and working collaboratively with partners to provide training and technical assistance to student support coordinators across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. You can contact Alexis at amv6178@psu.edu.

Spring 2024 Online Certificates

Check out the Penn State Spring 2024 Family Literacy and Adult Basic Education Online Certificates.

- 12-credit hours
- Fully online
- Scholarships available

Elevate your education and career from anywhere!

Courses offered in Spring 2024

Family Literacy Certificate

- [ADTED 459 – Interactive Literacy and Parent Involvement: Supporting Academic Success](#)

Adult Basic Education Certificate

Required Courses

- [ADTED 480 – Teaching Math and Numeracy to Adults](#)
- [ATED 560 – Teaching Reading to College Students and Adults](#) (CAN WAIVE Pre-Requisite)

Elective

- [ATED 470 – Introduction to Distance Education](#)
- [ADTED 506 – Program Planning in Adult Education](#)
- [ADTED 531 – Course Design and Development in Distance Education](#)
- [ADTED 542 – Perspectives on Adult Learning Theory](#)
- [ADTED 575 – Administration of Adult Education](#)
- [LDT 415A – Systematic Instructional Development](#)

[More Information](#)

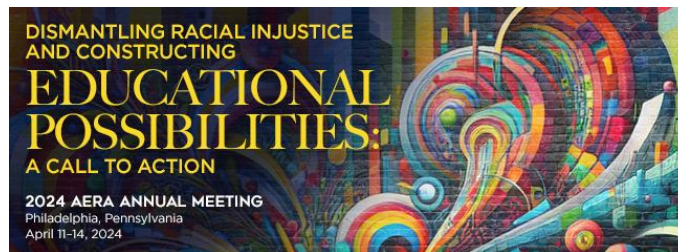
Upcoming Events and Conferences



Adult Education Research Conference

2024 Annual Adult Education Research Conference will be hosted by the University of Georgia and held at the UGA Gwinnett Campus June 13-15, 2024. The Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) is an annual North American conference that provides a forum for adult education researchers to share their experiences and the results of their studies with students, other researchers, and practitioners from around the world.

[Get Involved!](#)



2024 AERA Annual Meeting

AERA is excited to host its annual meeting on April 11-14, 2024 in Philadelphia. This year's theme asks researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to imagine boldly what education spaces free of racial injustice can look like.

[Register](#)

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