

Transformative Learning and Lifelong Learning for People with Disabilities

Lampros Gkiolias, PhD Candidate University of Alicante, lgkiolias@gmail.com

Introduction

Lifelong learning is a fundamental right and a powerful tool for personal development, social inclusion and professional advancement of people, regardless of disability. In this context, transformative learning, as described in Jack Mezirow's theory, plays a key role, as it enhances critical thinking and contributes to the revision of deeply held beliefs (Dumitru et al., 2024).

Objectives

The purpose of this paper is to highlight:

- The importance of transformative learning in the empowerment of people with disabilities.
- The role of the adult educator in creating an inclusive learning environment.
- The contribution of new technologies to the lifelong learning of people with disabilities.
- The link between lifelong learning and social inclusion and equal participation.

Transformative learning

Transformative learning allows people with disabilities to challenge social stereotypes and form new perceptions of their abilities. Through this process, learners re-examine their preconceptions and reinforce their autonomy and self-confidence. People with disabilities can use transformative learning to overcome their limitations and develop new skills (Mezirow, 2007; 2009; 2022). Transformative learning is a dynamic process that promotes reflection and reflective thinking, allowing people with disabilities to critically re-examine the social prejudices that affect them. Through this process, they challenge deep-rooted beliefs about their abilities and potential, revising perceptions often shaped by social norms and stereotypes (Taylor, 2018).

The role of the adult educator

The role of the adult educator is crucial in this process, as it is not limited to the transmission of knowledge, but acts as an animator and facilitator of the learning experience. He or she must adopt a guiding and supportive role, fostering an inclusive learning environment where people with disabilities feel safe to express, challenge and redefine their potential. In addition, it is necessary to recognise and highlight learners' skills, explore their specific learning needs and aim to facilitate their social inclusion (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Adult educators should support and expand the norms, social practices, institutions and systems that foster fuller and freer participation in interactive discussion, transformative learning, reflective action and greater activation of participants (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

The Role of New Technologies in Lifelong Learning for People with Disabilities

New technologies have a catalytic role in the lifelong learning of people with disabilities. Adapted learning platforms, assistive technologies and digital toolkits help people with disabilities to access educational content that was previously inaccessible or impossible (Kuşcu, 2015). New technologies enable personalised education, experiential learning and the development of critical thinking. Technology can act as a bridge that enhances learner autonomy, creating opportunities to develop new skills and boost self-confidence (Kotłataj et al, 2022). Lifelong learning for people with disabilities, when combined with new technologies, enhances social inclusion by enabling people with disabilities to participate equally in society. Moving from an attitude of limited opportunities to one of empowerment and participation makes people with disabilities full members of society, able to claim their rights and contribute to political, economic and social life (Kladaki & Mastrothanasis, 2023). Lifelong learning as a tool for social change contributes to reducing social inequalities and creating a more equitable society. It also contributes to the creation of a culture open to diversity and innovation, as people participating in continuing education programmes become more receptive to new ideas.

Conclusions

Lifelong learning is an essential necessity for people with disabilities, as it allows them to adapt to social and technological developments, expand their knowledge and skills and enhance their autonomy. When people with disabilities have equal opportunities to access knowledge, not only their individual development is enhanced, but also their collective progress, leading to a world where diversity is recognised as an asset rather than a barrier. Transformative learning can bring about radical changes in the way people with disabilities perceive their abilities and their potential. Learning should be tailored to the needs of people with disabilities and act as an empowerment mechanism, providing them with the tools to overcome barriers and participate actively in social and professional life.

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Contact

Email: lgkiolias@gmail.com