

Transformative Learning Meets *Bildung*

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Laros, A., Fuhr, T., & Taylor, E. W. (Eds.). (2017). *Transformative Learning Meets Bildung: An International Exchange*. Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense. 416 pp. \$54.00 (paperback).

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The purpose of the edited volume is to establish a transcontinental dialogue between the mainly North American transformative learning theory and the mainly European concept of *Bildung*. Its aim is to lay the groundwork for learning from each other and for perceiving theoretical foundations, educational practices, and empirical findings related to each of the two theoretical approaches. The 29 chapters are grouped into the following seven sections: Overview on *Bildung* and Transformative Learning, which contains introductions of *Bildung* theory (Thomas Fuhr) and of transformative learning theory (Edward W. Taylor); Transformative Learning and Transformative *Bildung*; Crisis and Continuity; Theoretical Approaches to *Bildung* and Learning; The Role of the Other in *Bildung* and Transformative Learning; Transformative Learning and *Bildung* in Times of Lifelong Learning; and Fostering Transformative Learning and *Bildung*. The final chapter offers a summary of what the editors have learned from the chapters in the book. Comparing the two theories and looking for similarities between them are not the editors' sole aims. Instead, they suggest paying special attention to the differences between the transformative learning and *Bildung* theories with respect to matters such as languages, research methodologies, stages of life, and philosophical and theoretical traditions in order to learn even more from each other.

In plural, rapidly changing societies, transformative learning and critical reflection are necessary prerequisites for dealing with change. They enable individuals to understand challenging experiences and to actively participate in processes of change. The authors in the book therefore discuss opportunities and limitations of transformative learning and *Bildung* theory. They refine both concepts theoretically and methodologically so that the theories can be an answer to current challenges.

At first glance, the selection of authors and the topics covered by the chapters may seem somewhat arbitrary. On closer inspection, this variety proves to be a great advantage. For instance, there is a whole range of perspectives, from detailed analyses of overlapping areas and of differences between *Bildung* and transformative learning theory, elaborated, for example, in the notion of *Bildung* as transformation of self-world-relations (e.g., Hans-Christoph Koller; Thomas Neubauer and Annika Lehmann) to the introduction of additional theoretical and methodological perspectives (e.g., systems

theory, biographical theory) to the examination of (somewhat) practical issues such as time, relationships in learning, dialogue, leadership, and art education, and of different target groups such as youth, parents, or migrants in both formal and nonformal settings.

The text is therefore fruitful for the theoretically interested reader, for those who want to specifically pursue the desideratum of enhanced empirical research in this area, and for readers who want to look at particular aspects of their own work in relation to *Bildung* and transformative learning. At the same time, the variety of authors, who are not only adult educators, as the originally adult educational construct of transformative learning by Jack Mezirow (1978, 1991) might suggest, shows clearly that the volume meets a need for increased transcontinental exchange. This is an important and promising challenge for which German-speaking adult education, at least, is just beginning to open.

The result is an intelligent, multilayered book that, critically and at a high scientific level, deals with the strengths and weaknesses of the two theoretical concepts regarding matters such as their empirical accessibility and currency and offers new approaches to them.

The main aim of the editors is to bring representatives of the two theoretical traditions into a transcontinental dialogue. By successfully providing an introduction to the language of each of the two theoretical concepts and spelling out this language on the basis of a variety of theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives, the book has fulfilled an important prerequisite for such a dialogue.

The book can be recommended to all those who want to become acquainted with *Bildung* or transformative learning theory, are looking for starting points for their own research within the other theoretical tradition, or would like to explore potentials for a synopsis of the two theoretical approaches.

In doing so, it is worthwhile to follow the recommendation of the editors and to avoid focusing solely on the seven sections in the volume, but also to discover more comprehensive contributions with valuable discussions within these sections (such as the article by Knud Illeris about transformative learning as change and development of identity or the chapter by Hans-Christoph Koller about *Bildung* as a transformative process).

The book provides a valuable foundation for thinking about change and transformation, for exploring it, and for finding pedagogical answers for dealing with it. The constant opportunity, urge, and necessity to change and transform have long since become a global challenge in this time of modernity.

References

- Mezirow, J. (1978). *Education for perspective transformation: Women's re-entry programs in community college*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Mezirow, J. (1991). *Transformative dimensions of adult learning*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.