



The European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA)
Transformative Processes in Learning and Education (TPLE) Network
In collaboration with the Hellenic Adult Education Association

What we know and don't know about transformation: Building a new community in research and praxis

The 4th Biennial Conference of the Network will be held in Athens (Greece)
from Thursday June 25th to Sunday June 28th, 2020

FIRST CALL FOR PAPERS

About the TPLE Network

The aim of the network is to create time and space for enhancing international dialogue and research on transformative processes in learning and education. Our conferences take place every other year at the end of the summer term. We place great emphasis on encouraging a diverse range of participants (students and experienced academics and professionals, and those working in a range of settings), and to using diverse formats such as presentations, workshops and experiential sessions. Participants come from all over the world. Time and space are given for dialogue and more informal encounters too.

History of the network

While transformative learning theory is probably the most recognized theory of adult learning currently, and has been so for a long time, it has not had much impact in European countries. This changed from 2011, when the 9th conference of the predominantly North American transformative learning network was the first to be hosted in Europe – in Athens (Alhadeff-Jones & Kokkos, 2011). This change of location created access for many European adult educators to engage in exchanges around the nature and meaning of transformative learning. The conference's great success created a buzz in a transcontinental conversation. The following conference, hosted in San Francisco (USA), however, only attracted a small number of European participants. This group of people talked together, however, and the question arose as to how the buzz could be brought back to life. Questions also arose on how research and dialogue around transformative learning could be brought to Europe, and how an exchange between European scholars could be supported. This was the starting point for the ongoing movement around transformative learning and concepts of transformation. Before the conference in San Francisco ended, the idea of starting something institutionalized in Europe was born. We soon decided that ESREA was an appropriate vehicle for our ideas and made an application to form a network. We had a launch meeting of the new network at the Freiburg conference on "Transformative learning meets Bildung" in 2013. This conference brought together scholars from all over Europe, North America and Africa in order to establish a

discourse between continental theories of *Bildung* and transformative learning theory (Laros, Fuhr & Taylor, 2017). This conference created further buzz around transformative learning in Europe, in theory and practice. In the same summer, a transatlantic symposium around “Re-framing Transformative Learning: A North American/ European Dialogue” was held at the triennial conference of ESREA in Berlin, which resulted in a special issue of the Journal of Transformative Education (Formenti & Dirkx, 2014). Furthermore, our network on “Interrogating Transformative Processes in Learning and Education” was firmly established within the ESREA family. Previous conferences organized by the network include: Athens (2014): “What’s the point of transformative learning”; Athens (2016): “The role, nature and difficulties of dialogue in transformative learning”; Milano (2018): “Contemporary dilemmas and learning for transformation”. In 2019, the network was renamed “Transformative Processes in Learning and Education”. The network is animated by four conveners: Michel Alhadeff-Jones (Teachers College, Columbia University, USA & Institut Sunkhronos, Switzerland); Alexis Kokkos (Hellenic Open University, Greece); Anna Laros (University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland); and Linden West (Canterbury Christ Church University, United Kingdom).

What we know and don’t know about transformation: Building a new community in research and praxis

Context of the 2020 conference

The context of our conference includes what we see as the limitations of much existing research and understanding of transformative processes in lifelong learning and adult education, and the need for less reductive sensibilities in our conversations, conferences and research. We need to acknowledge more of what we don’t know or are uncertain about in relation to human and or social transformation and transformative learning. We should strive, in dialogue, to combine cognitive, corporal, relational, psychosocial, aesthetic and ecological perspectives in getting closer to the complex heart of transformational experience. Ours is a time of urgency, crisis even, in our individual and collective lives and our relationship to the planet. We are witnesses to profound, sometimes disturbing economic, cultural and ecological transformations affecting individuals, whole societies and the planet. People can seem reluctant or unable to engage with all this, for fear, perhaps, of being overwhelmed. Diverse aspects of everyday life, the life course, as well as our relationships are all affected. The aim of this conference is to capitalize on existing literature on transformative learning (e.g., Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2012) and explore further more recent research initiatives, such as those associated with the development of the TPLE Network (e.g., Alhadeff-Jones, 2017; Flemming, Kokkos & Finnegan, 2019; Formenti & West, 2018; Laros, Fuhr & Taylor, 2017). Doing so, we would like to revisit collectively how we frame and engage with transformative processes, and resistance to them, in all dimensions, to help build a new, interdisciplinary, multi-referential, and imaginative research and praxis community. The aim of this conference is to extend the dialogue, again, with you, as to how our collective work can be enhanced, and in what ways and on what and whose terms.

Illuminating the complex dynamics that facilitate or constrain transformative processes

The idea of transformation, as the action of transforming or the fact of being transformed, refers to a type of change characterized, one way or another, by its radical nature. References made to transformation in lifelong learning and adult education involve processes, whose functional or symbolic effects can be envisioned as relatively “deep” or “durable”. Thus, the notion of transformation is generally used to evoke changes that affect significantly and durably our ways of feeling, knowing, and of relating to others, or to the environment, as well as, existentially, to self and

the other. Typically, such changes occur when adults reenter formal education, due to either personal or professional circumstances, including life crises. More broadly, the idea of transformation is associated with situations when life events challenge the taken for granted (e.g., in family, health, work) and trigger the need to think, feel, imagine and be, afresh; and to question and critically revisit the assumptions that frame how experience is encountered and interpreted (Mezirow, 1991). Transformations also occur through incremental changes that remain sometimes almost invisible (e.g., ageing, health condition, evolving relationship). Everyday life appears therefore as another locus to study and influence transformational dynamics.

Experiencing change and transformation has never been easy. In the contemporary context, additional difficulties appear with the increased tempo associated with phenomena of social and technological accelerations and the ways it affects personal and professional lives. Overly rapid experiences of “changeability” or a disturbing perception of too rapid a process of change, can lead to a destabilizing sense of impermanence, where depth and durability are no longer to be taken for granted. The lack of coherence, consistency, clarity or scale of what is desirable transformation (whether psychological, aesthetic, social, cultural, economic and or political) contributes to a kind of progressive despair. This can lead in turn to a cynical vision of adult or higher education, evacuated of meaning. Consumerist influences compound the problem. Feelings of resignation, too, even hopelessness about democracy, evoke acceptance of a *status quo* or return to the old seductions of strong leaders to sort out problems. Struggles to change may feel too hard, uncertain, long term, and time consuming. Fostering individual or collective transformation asks a lot of us, with attention to be given to our lives in their temporal, historical, material, cultural, relational, psychological, unconscious as well as aesthetic dimensions. This is a challenging agenda.

So, our conference is an attempt to chronicle and theorize, in an interdisciplinary, multi-referential and imaginative way, the complexities of transformative processes. We seek to work in dialogue, intensively, over the conference, using plenary sessions combined with intensive small group work. The groups and whole conference will operate in different and more experimental ways, in comparison with previous conferences: exchanging ideas and biographical information, giving time for discussion, as well as aesthetic/artistic/experiential expression to enhance our dialogue, insights and community.

We call for proposals and papers that strive to rethink, or reimagine, processes of transformation and research to illuminate transformations in more convincing, less reductive and superficial ways.

We imagine a conference where papers will be available in advance, published in the online Conference Proceedings. As work-in-progress, those papers will not necessary be “finished products” but communicate doubts and uncertainties. We will, as stated, work in small groups, for some of the time, focusing on themes and shared questions, privileging a heterogeneity of perspectives. Participants are asked to bring an object that represents some aspects of transformation, and to share their ideas and stories, as well as explore new ways of thinking, discussing, and connecting questions to generate new answers. Each group will have two experienced facilitators to manage and nurture the time and space in which thoughts, papers and practices are developed. Our hope is that the conference itself becomes a good enough transitional, and even a transformational community.

After the conference, we will work to compose an edited collection of texts, to be published as a new book, focusing on the fears, anxieties, temporalities, materialities, spiritualities, aesthetics as well as possibilities of transformative processes in learning and education in a troubled and “liquid” world. These texts will be based on the proposals submitted by the participants and will have a more extended and elaborated form.

Aim of the conference

Accordingly, the emphasis of the conference will be on formulating and exploring, collectively, in dialogue, **the questions** that currently shape how we conceive, study and promote transformative processes. Participants are asked to contribute to our conference with questions they do not have answers to and that they wish to explore further. Our work, as stated, is not to be structured in a traditional format privileged in previous conferences (paper presentation and short Q&A).

Our aim is to provide and facilitate a time and space, where participants can delve more deeply into the process of **exploring and discussing/answering questions** rather than just offering a place to share given answers and research results.

Call for papers

Interested participants will submit a proposal addressing the following points:

1) *Which ones of the twelve questions / themes below would you privilege to start working on in small groups during the conference? (please indicate your first and second choice)*

#1 How do we conceive the relations between individual and collective transformations?

#2 How do we conceive the relations between cognitions, emotions and the heart of transformations?

#3 How do we conceive the relations between material and spiritual dimensions of transformative processes?

#4 How do we conceive the meanings of dialogue and its relation to transformations?

#5 How do we conceive the relations between the experience of criticality (e.g., crisis, critical reflection) and transformative processes?

#6 How do we conceive the relations between the experience of space, time and the rhythms through which transformations unfold?

#7 How do we conceive the relations between identity and transformational processes (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, linguistic and cultural background, etc.)?

#8 How do we conceive the relations between organizational learning and transformative processes?

#9 How do we conceive the conscious and the unconscious dimensions of transformative processes?

#10 How do we explore transformative processes through alternative ways of knowing (e.g., symbolic, aesthetic, metaphorical, non-verbal, embodied, etc.)

#11 How do we conceive the relations between theory and praxis and the ways they relate to transformative processes?

#12 How do we study transformative processes (e.g., epistemological and methodological issues, researcher's positionality)?

2) *Explain why the two questions / themes selected are of interest for you?*

3) *How do you position yourself regarding the study and/or practice related to transformative processes (e.g., theoretical background, specific approach, methodology, etc.)?*

4) *What are the research questions and agenda you have been working on, or the areas of interest you are exploring, in relation to transformative processes in learning and education?*

5) *What are the issues, questions or challenges you are currently facing, or you have encountered in your own research and or practice (e.g., sources of uncertainty, vulnerability, dilemmas, etc.)?*

6) *What would be your expectations when meeting with other members of this community/network, or toward people who are interested in working on transformative processes?*

7) *What would be the profile of the participants you would like to work with during the working group sessions of this conference? (you can select several options)*

- Researchers interested in theoretical contributions
- Researchers interested in empirical research
- Researchers interested in methodological questions
- Doctoral candidates
- Practitioners interested in reflecting on educational practices
- Participants originating from countries that are different of one's own
- Participants from the same region of the world as oneself
- Participants having specific expertise in the field
- Participants with limited knowledge of the field

8) *During the conference, participants will have some estimated time to introduce their research and questions within their small working groups. This can include aesthetic/artistic/experiential activities. Please mention in your proposal how you wish to "introduce" your research and your "big unanswered" questions to your group.*

Submission of proposals

The closing date for submitting proposals is **January 13th, 2020**. Please submit your proposals by sending an email to the Conference organizing committee at tpleconference2020@gmail.com. Dr Effie Kostara will be providing administrative support to the process and organisation of the conference.

1) Format: Proposals should not exceed **750 words** and include only essential references as these form part of the word limit.

2) Style: **Anonymised**, in Times New Roman, 12 points type, single spaced.

3) Include a **separate contact page**, listing: abstract title, author(s) name(s), institutional affiliation, phone, and email. In case of multiple authors, please signal one author who will take on the responsibility of communication with the conference organizers.

4) Both abstract and contact page should be provided as .doc, .docx or .rtf files, titled respectively:

TPLE2020_Abstract_Short_Title

TPLE2020_Surname_First_name

Review process

Proposals will be blind reviewed by the Scientific Committee, and acceptance announced by **March 16th, 2020**.

Submitted proposals will be evaluated by the Scientific Committee, taking into consideration the relevance of the research and/or practical questions raised, the diversity of positions and voices presented, the originality of the contribution and the willingness of the participants to critically reflect on the assumptions that shape their work.

Guidelines for submission of papers

The papers (max. 1500 words) should be submitted by **May 11th, 2020** and sent to Dr Effie Kostara at tpconference2020@gmail.com

Detailed guidelines for submission of papers will be available on the conference website at a later date.

Language policy

ESREA's language policy seeks to be sensitive and inclusive. English will normally be used during the conference, in plenaries and small working groups, but dialogue can be held in another language, as long as the participants are able to help with the translation. More specifically:

- Abstracts for the peer-review process and papers must be in English.
- Authors who prefer to discuss in their language should contact the organizers in order to determine whether it is possible to find a registered participant who is able to help with the translation.
- Whenever interventions are made in another language, accompanying slides must be provided, in English or bilingual.
- English speakers are asked, too, where possible, to provide bilingual versions of their slides and be aware of the effort required by not-Anglophone others to follow.

At the conference, there will be no professional translation, but several colleagues are willing and able to help and facilitate dialogue. Tolerance, respect, mutual support and curiosity will do the rest. Participants requiring some translation or explanation should be aware that they can say less in the allotted time, hence plan for this – perhaps by providing essential information in the form of a hand-out, for example.

Conference Fees and registration

EARLY BIRD REGISTRATION (before April 3rd, 2020)

ESREA¹ members: 180 Euros

HAEA members: 180 Euros

Non-members: 250 Euros

Ph.D. Students: 120 Euros (3 bursaries for PhD students will be available, see below)

FULL FEE (after April 3rd, 2020)

ESREA members: 250 Euros

HAEA members: 250 Euros

Non-members: 320 Euros

Ph.D. Students: 170 Euros

To register to the conference, please fill in the following form:

<https://forms.gle/oUkepQWxJmxDxSqZ6>

¹ To become a member of ESREA, visit <http://www.esrea.org> and click on "Membership"

Bursaries

ESREA offers three bursaries, in order to support participation of graduate and doctoral students. In order to be eligible for a bursary, the applicant needs to

- be a graduate student – doing a Doctoral or Master’s Degree,
- be an individual member of ESREA or a student from a member institution; and
- have a proposal accepted, and presented during the conference.

Application should contain information about the academic position of the applicant, a letter of support from the supervisor and the reasons for applying (e.g., lack of funding from his/her institution).

The bursary of maximum 300 Euros can only be used to cover travel expenditures and/or accommodation. Details about bursaries will be provided on the conference website.

Individuals who hold a position at a university, including Ph.D. or other doctoral students who are employed full-time by their university, are expected to pay the regular fee. Those who register as a Doctoral student need to be able to show proof of their status.

Organization of the conference

Before the Conference

A group of network members, who have participated in previous conferences, will be identified and contacted in order to define how best to facilitate the working groups, and according to what criteria or perspectives. Through webinars, common ground will be defined to frame the facilitation process and identify each facilitator’s preferences (e.g., themes, facilitation style).

Based on their proposals and the preferences formulated, participants will be selected and assigned to a specific working group. Each group will be assigned one of the twelve themes / questions defined above. Although such themes / questions will serve as triggers and entry points for the members of each group to start working together, the dialogue nurtured among participants may go beyond the initial themes / questions introduced. The organizers will do their best to match participants’ interests and preferences, as expressed in their proposals. Groups will be formed considering both participants’ contributions and the value of having heterogeneous groups confronting diverse perspectives. Participants will be working with their assigned group during two mornings at the conference.

First day of the conference (Thursday June 25th 2020)

During the afternoon, the facilitators of the working groups will meet in order to establish common guidelines to facilitate small group work throughout the conference and finalize the organization of the sessions.

During the first evening, participants will have the opportunity to gather informally and meet all the other participants, as well as the members of the working group to which they will be assigned. They will bring an object, as suggested above – a poem, artefact, etc. – that best symbolizes their relationship to transformation, its meanings and illumination.

Second day of the conference (Friday June 26th 2020)

The day will start with a short Welcome to participants in plenary. Then, participants will be dispatched. During the morning, the small working groups will meet to identify the specific themes or questions they have shared. No formal presentations will be made. Participants will have time to introduce themselves, their research interests and the key issues in their texts. Participants discussion of their own research should focus on unanswered questions or uncertainties; and or what do they feel like not knowing something about; what would they like to know more about?

At lunch time and during the first part of the afternoon there will be the opportunity for all the participants of the conference to meet and discuss informally, in order to establish new connections and reinforce existing relations.

The second part of the afternoon will provide the opportunity to share, in plenary session, issues and questions raised during the morning, as well as address common themes and questions shaping the whole life of the network. Each working group will be encouraged to provide a short presentation of where they are in their work. This can take the form of words, or maybe a moment of theatre, sculpture, etc.

Late afternoon and the evening will provide participants with informal activities to further develop connections and mutual encounters.

Third day of the conference (Saturday June 27th 2020)

On Saturday morning, participants will pursue their dialogue within the same working group as Friday. The organization of the day will be similar to Friday.

Fourth day of the conference (Sunday June 28th 2020)

On Sunday morning the work done in each group will be synthesized and presented in plenary, according to a style chosen by each group.

The assembly will then formulate key points emerging from reflections and dialogue in order to formalize key issues, questions and contributions which appear relevant for building a shared research agenda and preparing a book.

The overall processes of the conference will be evaluated to enable us to define the steps to be taken to prepare for next time.

About the location of the conference

Precise information soon!

For further information, please contact the organizers of the conference, via Dr Effie Kostara at tpleconference2020@gmail.com

Best wishes,

The Network Conveners

Michel Alhadeff-Jones, Alexis Kokkos, Anna Laros, Linden West