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Education Versus Learning: Restorative Practices in Higher Education

Craig W. Adamson¹,²,³ and John W. Bailie¹,³

Abstract
Increasing numbers of adults are returning to a diverse array of higher education settings. Institutions that serve this population must consider the meaning of education to these students, their needs, and the modes of instruction most likely to meet those needs. Approaches to education have historically tended toward mechanistic and routine-oriented learning. However, adult learning is best accomplished through more flexible, collaborative, and transformative processes. Adult learning literature over the last several decades has offered challenges and insights into these two approaches. This literature has been rich in its exploration of diverse ideological and conceptual concerns related to the desire to create a more empowering and transformative experience of learning. This article provides a brief historical overview of education and learning as concepts with a focus on the insights of recent adult learning scholarship. The authors will also discuss how the emerging field of restorative practices offers new perspectives on these approaches. As a field that has developed independently of adult learning scholarship, but shares many of its commitments, restorative practices offer a fresh view on adult learning scholarship.

Keywords
adult learning, transformative learning, restorative practices, education

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Introduction

Increasing numbers of adults are returning to a diverse array of higher education settings and even constitute an increasing percentage of students in undergraduate programs (Kasworm, 2003). In 1971, adults older than 24 constituted approximately a quarter of undergraduate enrollment but now constitute nearly half of the total number (Kasworm, 2003). Other adults are returning to graduate studies in increasing numbers in response to career changes, desire remaining competitive in their field, and other reasons related to economic disruption and restructuring (Pusser et al., 2007). Institutions that serve this population must consider the meaning of education to these students, their needs, and the modes of instruction most likely to meet those needs.

The relatively new field of adult learning has attempted to explore how adults learn and create meaning. Approaches to education have historically tended toward mechanistic and routine-oriented learning. However, adult learning is best accomplished through more flexible, collaborative, and transformative processes (McEhinney, 1994). Adult learning literature over the last several decades has offered challenges and insights into these two approaches. Small and interactive group processes in the classroom are more appropriate to most adult learning experiences where there are likely to be multiple right answers to a given problem or challenge. This confirms Mezirow’s (1997) theories of transformative learning in that groups ideally should allow for affect, critically reflect, limit the influence of disruptive members, and have equal opportunity to challenge and generalize learning (McEhinney, 1994). Far from a mere semantic difference, the concepts of education and learning in formal educational institutions bring contradictory assumptions about learners and the purpose of formal educational programming. Adult learning scholarship offers a new lens through which to view these tensions and has the potential to provide a road map for institutional transformation. Additionally, the emerging field of restorative practices, as a discipline that has developed independently of adult learning scholarship but shares many of its commitments, adds a new voice to adult learning scholarship (Adamson, 2012; Wachtel & McCold, 2001). When restorative practices are combined with the concept of transformative learning, it creates an organizational vision toward fostering adult learning.

The authors are on the faculty of the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). The IIRP Graduate School is a new higher education institution that evolved from two other organizations, the Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy. These two organizations have provided day-treatment alternative schools, counseling, and foster-group homes to troubled youth in Southeastern Pennsylvania, since 1977. The IIRP was founded in 2000, as a nonprofit organization with a mission to provide restorative practices training and consulting to schools, youth-serving organizations, and criminal justice agencies. The IIRP also founded offices and affiliates in Europe, the United Kingdom, Central/South America, Asia, and Australia. The IIRP was instrumental in creating a unified
rationale that restorative practices, though including existing concepts from many academic fields, constituted a new field of study in its own right worthy of scholarship at the graduate level. The IIRP was approved to operate and grant master’s degrees in the State of Pennsylvania in 2006 and its accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 2011.

Restorative practices maintain that all learners bring their own particular expertise and capabilities to the learning process, which is constructed through dialog and discourse (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). Principles of restorative practices and adult learning theories are similar as they pertain to learning construction. Cranton (2006) describes transformative learning as a process by which a person’s perspective is changed by questioning assumptions, values, perspectives, and beliefs. She states that learning is a process rather than a disconnected set of discreet experiences that create “ah-ha” moments. For Cranton (2006), learning is viewed through a constructive perspective regarding how an adult learner revises his or her interpretation of information. To these areas of conceptual overlap, restorative practices add a practical model for the use of authority in the classroom and distinct classroom practices that aid in creating an environment conducive to transformative learning. While there is a growing body of evidence documenting the effects of the restorative practices approach in areas such as kindergarten through 12th-grade education (Morrison, 2003), criminal justice (Masters, 1997), and family services (Merkel-Holguin, Nixon & Burford, 2002), there has only been one published investigation to date into the application of this philosophy in graduate education with another in process. Adamson (2012) investigated this same population and found that this type of learning environment cultivated emotional and relational learning and that students evidenced transformative learning experiences related to their participation in restorative processes (p. 131). This article aims to situate restorative practices within the body of adult learning scholarship and describe this new field’s unique contributions to the field.

Education

The early part of the 20th century saw the widespread growth of industrialization, the advent of mass communication, and advances in transportation. Highly industrial societies, such as the United States, were becoming increasingly complex, leading American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1916) to assert that mass schooling was necessary in order to prepare children to “share effectively in adult activities” (p. 9). While this sentiment sounds sensible enough at first read, one must consider exactly what adult activities Dewey and others thought that individuals must be prepared to undertake.

Prior to this time, most Americans lived a largely rural and agricultural existence. Most people lived or worked on farms. Others lived in small towns that supported largely agricultural enterprises. New industrial enterprises, such as coal, textiles, and large-scale manufacturing, reshape American life and the very future of the young.
Industrialization required that new industrial workers and their families be increasingly concentrated in urban areas and where, according to Zinn (2003), their lives would be “filled with cause for rebellion” (p. 43).

The concern of educational philosophers, such as Dewey (1916), was not only with the education of young people, but in a transformation and formation of the minds and habits of future workers. As a necessary counterweight to socialist labor agitation, schools “taught that to be rich was a sign of superiority, to be poor a sign of personal failure” (p. 43). The system of public education born during this time serves a dual function of preparing individuals for the complexity of work in a modern industrialized society while also inculcating acceptance of and belief in the necessity of a highly class-stratified society.

The motivations behind the creation of more regimented schooling and increasingly formalized higher education programming cannot be simplistically attributed to base greed and the desire to manipulate the working class. This period of American history was also replete with utopian dreams of the creation of a highly advanced and scientific society in which mass education would be necessary and available to all. Coal power seemed to offer limitless opportunities for industrial expansion (Taylor-Gatto, 2000). The railroad had opened the west. The telegraph and radio now quickened the exchange of knowledge and made large-scale industrial coordination possible. Central to the goal of encouraging the growth of this modern technological culture was the belief that “effective early indoctrination of all children would lead to an orderly scientific society” (Taylor-Gatto, 2000, p. 53). This regimented form of education would be necessary to reorient the more independent and generally libertarian agrarian mind to the complexity of urban industrial life and the need for more specialized work. The policy and philosophical elites who stewarded this shift believed that they were ushering in a new era of development for humanity. However, their vision held a strong bias. According to Taylor-Gatto (2000) and Zinn (2003), this bias placed the needs of industrial development and the expansion of capitalist enterprise first and concerns for the dignity and liberty of workers second. As a fundamental social paradigm shift, this new society would require more than simply preparing adults to operate within it. It would require individuals to believe in it. This necessitated a system of mass education unified by specific values and ideologies molded by class interests. Dewey (1916) was an ardent evangelist for the new ideological mission of mass education. He asserts, “By various agencies, unintentional and designed, a society transforms uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into robust trustees of its own resources and ideals. Education is thus as fostering, nurturing and cultivating process” (1916, p. 12).

On the farm, independence, innovation, and ingenuity were necessary and natural fruits of rural life. But in the factory, dependence on owners and the acceptance of monotony and obedience would be prized traits in workers (Taylor-Gatto, 2000). Public schooling for the young would now prepare students for industrial life by providing the minimal necessary knowledge to perform new and more scientifically complex work tasks. Also, except at the most elite institutions, higher education...
would prepare future managers to effectively support and propagate the new order of things (Finn, 1999; Taylor-Gatto, 2000; Zinn, 2003).

Adult learning began to take on a more functional and utilitarian quality as the need for an industrial bureaucracy grew (Taylor-Gatto, 2000; Zinn 2003). Freire (2005) asserts that the effect of this shift was a fundamental dehumanization as adults became increasingly harnessed to goals that undermined their own self-interest. The largely independent and self-directed learning and apprenticeship models of rural learning were replaced by a highly coordinated and standardized model of learning that was more hierarchical, dogmatic, and authoritarian than any that had preceded it in American life. An education system had replaced learning.

Learning

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory has been built on the concept that adults learn differently than children. Knowles (1998) defined this idea as andragogy. Knowles, also known as the grandfather of adult learning theory, contends that adults’ learning depends on need and life experience. He believes motivation for learning is life driven or problem centered. Though there are certainly developmental differences in regard to cognition and life experience, Knowles asserts that adult learning should be centered on motivation, which can be applied across the developmental spectrum. Adult learning theory has proven to be fertile ground for development.

The roots of theory development specific to the field of adult learning in the United States can be traced back to the early part of the 20th century, including Dewey’s (1920) call for practical education, the founding of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926 (Hiemstra, 1995), Thorndike’s development of connectionism and its influence on educational psychology (Thorndike, Bregman, Tilton, & Woodyard, 1928) and Lindeman’s (1926) book titled The Meaning of Adult Education. From these early works more groups and advocates further explored adult education, specifically creating a need for ideas, concepts, and theory development. Through adult learning scholarship, themes have emerged as theoretical foundations to explain adult learning. Historically, educational research was focused toward children and youth and their intellectual development (Erikson, 1959; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). The emerging discipline of adult learning allows exploration through research and inquiry about how adults develop thinking, understanding, and meaning making. Gaining a better understanding of what practices, processes, themes, and environments create or promote growth for an adult learner is important.

Transformative learning theory has emerged as a form of adult learning theory that describes learning processes challenging current knowledge frames. A transformative learning perspective could be helpful in exploring a basically unknown emerging discipline such as restorative practices since it provides opportunities for adult learners to view traditional education models differently.
Transformative Learning

Mezirow (1978), a leading theorist in the adult learning literature, developed the concept of transformative learning for adults. According to Mezirow, when transformative learning does happen, certain elements are present and include reframing of assumptions and beliefs that are then applied to practice. This transformative view moves away from traditional educational practices of rigid memorization. Perspective, reflection, experience, meaning making, and interpretation are consistent themes throughout the transformative learning literature and are all key elements in order for transformative learning to occur (Cranton, 2006; Freire, 2005; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000). Kegan (2000) builds on this theory by discussing adult learning from a constructive developmental framework. Kegan (2000) argues that people learn over time through an introspective journey that creates fundamental shifts in thinking as they become aware of new experiences and learning in relation to others and the outer world.

Mezirow (2000) further defines adult learning processes through his description of “habits of mind.” “A habit of mind is a set of assumptions—broad, generalized, orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (p. 17). A habit of mind is similar to an expression of an opinion or point of view but is rooted deeper in morality and experience. Mezirow (2000) and Cranton (2006) describe a point of view as a result of the way we describe our habit of mind. A habit of mind is specific to an individual and encompasses sociocultural perspectives and environmental components that people encounter every day. These habits of mind are emotionally, intellectually, and unconsciously connected and defended (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow & Associates, 2000). Mezirow and Cranton argue that learning is more significant than knowledge acquisition and that internal factors contribute to the learning process as much as external factors. Mezirow and Cranton contend that individualized development, rather than mass information consumption, is what truly advances learning.

Critical Reflection

Continuing with individual internal learning factors, reference to reflective processes is commonplace throughout the adult learning literature. In addition to actual experiences, reflective processes are necessary in order for learning to occur (Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Mezirow, Taylor & Associates, 2009). Mezirow (2009) discusses the need to further articulate the difference between reflection and a more substantial process of learning called “critical reflection.” The critical aspect of reflection is the central part of transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow & Associates, 2000; Mezirow, Taylor & Associates, 2009). Mezirow (2000) defines critical reflection as questioning and perhaps challenging existing values, beliefs, and assumptions. It is not simply a response to information or facts; it is a deeper understanding of perspective and meaning.
More recently, Brookfield (2009) has explored the meaning of critical reflection as it relates to critical theory. He states that the word “critical” indicates a need to challenge dominant political structures in order to transform. “Critical theory views thinking critically as being able to identify, and then to challenge and change, the process by which a grossly iniquitous society uses dominant ideology to convince people this is a normal state of affairs” (Brookfield, 2009, p. 126). Within this context, reflection becomes a significant event as individuals question engrained beliefs and challenge significant power structures that keep people oppressed. Many of these concepts being questioned and challenged were born and breed through educational systems. As per Brookfield, critical reflection may result in changing beliefs and confronting those in power or systems that have significant authority.

Challenging a habit of mind through critical reflection and experimentation focuses a person on learning rather than on memorizing information that is sometimes viewed as knowledge. Expectations of learning are placed directly on the student, as opposed to having the institution fill a student with information and knowledge. This represents a move from traditional goals of “banking” knowledge models in education to provide environments for learning opportunities (Freire, 2005). These learning environments are meant to create conflict and contradiction for students so that substantial learning can occur (Mezirow, Taylor & Associates, 2009). Again, education as primarily a process of knowledge acquisition is challenged when students take responsibility for their own learning process.

**Students’ Position**

Cameron (2002) discusses how creating dialog and contradiction within student’s learning fosters social change. She goes on to discuss knowledge production, which places the “teachers and students as equal subjects in the learning process” (p. 1). Within the adult learning literature, many pedagogical styles have a tone of empowering students and discussing the complexity of students’ learning needs. Imel (1998) confirms this perspective by calling for role definitions for learners and teachers. She contends that teachers have a responsibility to establish trust and rapport while modeling learning and accepting change. Learners are responsible for creating learning environments to promote transformational learning. From this perspective, students have a more integral role in choosing how to learn and in what context. Power within the classroom is shared.

The importance of empowerment, emotions, and interpersonal relationships are paramount in human development (Clark & Dirkx, 2008; Glasser, 1988). After an event or situation, a person can reflect on both the thinking and feeling of the experience. It is not only a matter of identifying the issue or habit of mind that needs to change but of experiencing emotion along with the knowledge that allows for change (Glasser, 1988; Goleman, 2006). Glasser is known for his work in both education and psychology disciplines and asserts that most issues are related to relationships and that we have direct control over our own thinking and behavior.
It is his belief that learning is as much emotional as it is cognitive. These ideas are common in both restorative practices and transformative learning theories but were developed independently of each other. Both perspectives embrace the importance of affective and emotional influences of adult learners and the challenge of complex human experiences in learning (Clark & Dirkx, 2008). Whereas restorative practices perspectives have significant definitional roots in affect theory relating to shame (Nathanson, 1992).

Viewing students as parts of an assembly line that are only measured by their outputs is a mistake and creates disadvantages for many groups (Anderson, 2007). By breaking free of the constraining grasp of rigid educational models, innovative learning environments can emerge. Systems and institutions can develop from a new paradigm rather than an industrial perspective.

**Transformative Potential of Institutions**

Shor (1988) insists that critical classrooms where truly relevant learning is possible must be participatory, critically reflective, democratic, interdisciplinary, and activist oriented. Shor asserts that these factors assist the student in moving from a disempowered passive role into a full consideration of what they already know as well as of their own potential for making new meaning and experiencing self-management of the learning process. Shor emphasizes the necessity of putting the student in power over his or her own learning. This is the most reliable means of retaining a truly critical and transformative education that ripples beyond the classroom.

The hope that formal institutions can play a transformative role in the effort to make learning meaningful is not lost or impossible. Like the other thinkers above, Nesbit (2006) agrees “educational systems are . . . one of the most important vehicles for ‘hegemony,’ the process by which a society inculcates and maintains dominant ideas by portraying them as natural and normal” (p. 172). Conversely he also asserts that, “education can also counter hegemony by helping people understand how they might resist and challenge oppressive social structures and behaviors” (p. 172). If this corrective potential of formal institutions is to be realized, those institutions must first acknowledge and confront their positioning in society. In some cases, those institutions might even discover they have a responsibility to teach their students to resist and to confront the institutional culture of academia itself—a complex task. Nesbit argues this is possible if the institution can truly build its structures and processes around the voices and needs of students and the marginalized.

In *Teaching Community, Praxis and Courage*, Renner (2009) asserts that education and learning institutions have the potential to play an important role in the re-invigoration and building of community, which is under assault by the alienating and community-destroying aspects of neoliberal capitalism. Whereas capitalistic structures of control encourage compartmentalization among the governed, educational institutions and new learning technologies have the potential to promote...
global and holistic thinking. Precisely, because they provide the freedom to think and explore issues on a deeper level, institutions of learning can be strategically poised to offer critical analysis of the current system. To do so, Renner (2009) argues they should have an orientation toward:

- **Community**: Teachers, students and parents should work together. Teachers should model amongst each other the community they wish to create in their students and communities—especially if their goals are more radical.

- **Praxis**: They must be socially engaged and see through humanizing pedagogical practices that pose problems for their students, making the world a series of issues to be researched, resolved, and improved, rather than one that is given, static, and unchanging.

- **Courage**: They must be willing to challenge and engage institutions and the wider society. (p. 72)

In such institutions, learning should be designed to counteract student resistance to playing an active role. Such resistance may result from learned passivity or a desire for the teacher to do all the work (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000). It would be important to discuss in the classroom what it means to be a good student and the assumptions around that idea. Power and authority structures should work against authoritarianism as an unethical expansion of authority that hoards empowering tasks into the control of authority figures (Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000).

Systems of learning organized with these liberating goals in mind might actually assist learners in moving to more empowered developmental stages with regard to authority. Perry asserts that a developmental scheme exists in which learners evolve toward a more conscious and meaningful relationship with authority figures (as cited in Love & Guthrie, 1999). According to Love and Guthrie (1999), “If a decline in self-motivation among college students in general is a valid assumption, then creating environments that induce maturation or growth becomes that much more important” (p. 15). The explicit integration of this developmental scheme into the design of learning systems could potentially clarify the role of the educator as that of facilitator rather than possessor of knowledge.

**Restorative Practices**

According to Wachtel and McCold (2001), “Individuals function best when those in positions of authority do things ‘with’ them rather than ‘to’ them or ‘for’ them” (p. 124).

This approach creates an institutional environment that actively engages learners by providing participatory learning processes that balance the need for limits, boundaries, and structure with engagement, support, and nurturing. Wachtel and McCold term this approach restorative. It seeks to restore full participation in the learning process and the development of community. This is accomplished by providing a range of informal and formal engagement practices that are designed to encourage learners to take personal responsibility for their own learning, share
ideas and opinions, and collectively negotiate expectations for behavior. The Social Discipline Window offers a simple description of this model (see Figure 1).

The Restorative Classroom

The authoritarian education-oriented classroom is typified by tightly controlled educator-centered learning. The presumption is that the educator is the primary content expert whose task is to fill the mind of the student. The student’s role under this model of education is generally passive. The task of the student largely revolves around the absorption of course material and to be able to regurgitate information on demand. Glasser (1990) describes this type of classroom as one in which students are seen as “things” to be managed (p. 17). Glasser notes that much of pedagogy and education institutions in general treat students as if they are static, inanimate, and passive. This classroom expects no resistance and reacts harshly when it is encountered. The lack of engagement and one-way flow of communication from authority to subordinate (doing things to people) creates a dynamic in which it is difficult or impossible to have meaningful personal responsibility in learning. The punitive/authoritarian model is the most common mode of operation for existing educational institutions, both in their pedagogy and in the management of behavior.

Wachtel and McCold (2001) describe a simple continuum of practices arranged from informal to formal that can be employed by educational institutions seeking to create a highly restorative culture (see Figure 2). Wachtel and McCold assert that practices such as affective statements and questions encourage direct and emotionally rich communication between community members. Small impromptu conferences or meetings allow people to convene informally to resolve conflicts.

Figure 1. Restorative practices represents high support and high control simultaneously, Wachtel and McCold, 2001, p. 117.
or share positive experiences. More formal groups and circles provide forums where community members can learn more about one another, build relationships and trust, set behavioral norms, and collaborate in the learning process. Circles are simple processes wherein learners take turns speaking in order around the circle—usually prompted by a question or discussion topic. Circles can be used to discuss course content, share opinions, and to engage learners in setting behavioral norms and discussing problems. This process asks learners to participate fully in the tasks of learning and in behavioral regulation, areas usually controlled and managed by authority figures. Finally, formal conferences allow for structured opportunities to repair harm in the wake of serious behavioral incidents or conflict. Conferences allow those affected and those responsible for harm to address instances of wrongdoing—often without recourse to punitive sanctions. All of the above examples reflect Glasser’s (1990) belief that “managing people depends for its ultimate success on the cooperation of the people being managed” (p. 17).

Restorative processes provide specific mechanisms that support the various components of transformative learning discussed above. Students are charged with the responsibility and given the tools to help create and maintain an environment consistent with transformative learning. Open dialog in which individuals can safely reflect upon information and its application to life experiences encourages critical reflection and the ability to challenge habits of mind. Using language that expresses feelings as well as ideas reflects the proposition that learning is as much emotional as it is cognitive. Restorative classrooms are highly participatory environments in which students are encouraged to consider their thoughts and feelings about course content while being active members in a healthy community of their peers. Restorative practices does not state that it is the creator of unique approaches not yet seen by professionals, rather it provides a framework to implement these processes on purpose and in a consistent manner.

Rethinking Power Dynamics

Proponents of restorative classrooms recognize that learning is a participatory process and challenge the false idea that authority figures are the primary purveyors
of knowledge (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). Restorative practices support specific andragogical philosophies, both at an organizational level and in the classroom, in a manner that seeks to engage and empower learners while de-emphasizing the expert model of education centered on authority figures. Restorative practices offer participatory mechanisms to engage adults who have been conditioned to be passive learners.

Freire (1998) in Pedagogy of Freedom integrates many of the dynamics discussed above. While the education system involves dynamics that distort the use of power and authority, Freire asserts this does not mean a radical rejection of all forms of authority in order. He puts forth the concept that we should work toward doing things “with” students rather than “to” them (p. 60). Authority is necessary; authoritarianism is not. This is precisely how Wachtel and McCold (2001) explain the balanced and optimal use of authority in relation to adult learners. Transformative institutions must culturally embed cooperative models of power and authority at the organizational level and specific andragogical practices at the classroom level. These institutional and andragogical commitments must seek to engage and empower learners while de-emphasizing the expert model of education centered mainly on authority figures (Glasser, 1990). These practices have the potential to offer a participatory mechanism to engage passivity in adult learners conditioned by systems of education.

Freire’s (2005) work was profound in that adults learned how to read and vote, in a short period of time. Freire’s work with adult learners resulted in freedom, increased human rights, and the learner’s opportunity to have a voice. While Freire’s work is inspiring and created avenues for those oppressed to gain a voice, the question arises, Is pushing someone to challenge their own core beliefs and worldviews ethical? Ettling (2006) raises this concern about transformative learning processes. She challenges the issues surrounding educators that push students to challenge their habits of mind and create conflict that was not previously present. In Brazil, Freire’s work was ethical and allowed a class of citizens to gain civil liberties. However, Ettling (2006) believes that when those in authority push people without understanding the possible consequences, it could be harmful such as in the above example, that people could have been persecuted based on their learning.

This critique of transformative learning results in a caution to educators about the ways in which they approach learning processes. There are evident power and authority interactions that are assumed in educational processes by the educator and learner (Brookfield, 2005). Ideology seems to be present in learning, even if it is based on critical theory. Ettling (2006) looked at these issues from two perspectives: ethics related to purpose and ethics related to practice. She calls for an educator to know oneself and to understand what they are asking of their students. Her position raises appropriate concerns regarding transformation and creates a dilemma that is worth further discussion.

Ethical considerations concerning teaching techniques could impact how students perceive their learning experiences. Since restorative practices includes exchanges of emotion and human interaction in times of challenges or conflict, understanding
power dynamics provides insight into how to conduct these processes ethically, as Ettling (2006) suggests. Learners should be aware and institutions explicitly state if the philosophy and a goal of transformation is present, thus reducing the ethical concerns of manipulation.

Power and authority issues are also common discussions in restorative practices as in the adult learning literature. Christie (1977) does not describe his argument in a restorative context but the tenets are similar. Christie calls for the deconstruction of power imbalances and expert models that steal conflict away from those that have been impacted. Specifically, Christie described criminal justice systems and attorneys as stealing the conflict away from stakeholders and creating new vocabulary and procedures only understood by the experts. Restorative practices have their roots in Christie’s position and have developed from the perspective that people and communities are competent and able to deal with issues themselves (Wachtel & McCold, 2001). This is also congruent with Glasser’s (1988) work that states people should exercise choice and are competent to make their own decisions. As these concepts converge, they are centered on our social need to be connected with other human beings in a meaningful way (Goleman, 2006; Nathanson, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978).

From the emerging disciplines of restorative practices and transformative learning, we can view the act of learning through a different lens. In restorative learning environments, classes are conducted in circles with engaging and empowering discussions (Costello, Wachtel, & Wachtel, 2009). Quiet voices are heard and dominating voices are quieter. Power and authority become more balanced, with students taking responsibility for their own learning and for their learning environment. This is done on purpose, semester after semester, at the IIRP. The development of restorative classrooms does not happen by accident or as the result of a special group of students, but because of a commitment to an explicit model of power and authority and a set of concrete practices that all are expected to employ. A highly restorative culture is intentionally created in order to promote transformative learning. Restorative practices inform transformative learning theory by incorporating processes that encourage balances of authority and power, while allowing expressions of affect and emotion. Nathanson (1992) states that by maximizing the opportunities to express affect, humans move from more toxic affects to more positive affects and emotions.

Restorative practice is not a utopian dream or a panacea. However, it could have a significant impact on how students and academics view learning and growth. More research needs to be conducted regarding restorative practices’ impact on adult students and classroom environments. It is imperative that rigorous research be undertaken to measure the effects of restorative practices in higher education settings.

Within participatory learning environments, other concerns emerge. Learning influenced by group members has its downside. Owenby (2002) discusses the “dark side” to learning communities. His main point was concerning nonidentified power interests within these communities and how learners should be informed of power issues. Hidden power issues could produce a type of tokenistic empowerment that can be undermining to learning processes and can be manipulative to the learner.
As Ettling (2006) discussed the concerns of unethical teaching practices in participatory learning, Owenby (2002) states that uncovering hidden authority and power issues in groups are keys to creating a culture for transformative learning. Creating an environment that allows for transparency is essential for true cooperation (Cranston, 2006). Restorative practices and transformative learning theory need to gain further understanding of these dynamics between facilitator and learner as well as learner to learner in group settings.

**Conclusion**

Traditional approaches to education have historically tended toward mechanistic and routine-oriented learning. However, adult learning is best accomplished through more flexible, collaborative, and transformative processes. They conflict in their assumptions about learners, which in turn heavily influence classroom practices and institutional formation. Adult learning scholarship offers a perspective through which to view these tensions and may provide a road map for institutional transformation. The emerging field of restorative practices has the potential to assist with this transformation by offering both participatory practices to engage adult learners who have been conditioned to be passively educated and a clear unified philosophy concerning the best exercise of power and authority for those who wish to teach and those who seek to learn. Those who want to understand the tensions between educating and learning must understand the roots and assumptions underlying these concepts. Those who seek to create transformative systems of learning must go beyond traditional educational models. Adult learning theories coupled with restorative practices offer an opportunity to create a cross-discipline approach that consistently and purposefully creates opportunities for transformative learning.

**Authors’ Note**

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**Bios**

**Craig W. Adamson**, Executive Director, oversees the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) model programs at Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy (CSF Buxmont). These include day treatment/alternative education, in-home and community-based counseling, foster care and conferencing for at-risk youth and their families in eastern Pennsylvania. Dr. Adamson’s dedication to introducing restorative programming in community-based settings, empowering families, keeping youth connected to their families and providing quality restorative services to families and youth is central to his work at CSF Buxmont. He has been with the organization in counseling and administrative positions since 1995. Dr. Adamson was a Lecturer at the IIRP Graduate School and more recently became an Assistant Professor. His interests include the influences of restorative practices in justice, education, counseling and adult learning. He is a Certified Addictions Counselor, earned a Master of Restorative Practices and Youth Counseling from the IIRP in 2008 and a PhD in Education from Lesley University in 2012.

**John W. Bailie**, directs the IIRP Continuing Education programs in the U.S. and abroad. With the IIRP’s SaferSanerSchools program, he has brought restorative practices to hundreds of schools, including those in at-risk areas of New York City, Detroit, Philadelphia and Baltimore. John is a frequent presenter at international conferences and events and appears in several documentaries on restorative practices. His professional development work also includes that with juvenile probation and children and youth agencies. John is an experienced restorative conference facilitator in adult and juvenile cases, including those involving felony-
level offenses. John spent many years as a counselor for troubled and at-risk youth at a Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy (CSF Buxmont) day treatment/alternative school operating entirely according to restorative practices (an IIRP model program). Having done graduate-level work in theological studies, John is well versed in the connection between restorative practices and faith. John received a Master of Restorative Practices and Youth Counseling from the IIRP in 2008 and a PhD in Education from Lesley University in 2012.