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Imagens visuais e visão do mundo em um espaço millennial autorreflexivo: Arte-Educação como catalisador

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RESUMO — Imagens visuais e visão do mundo em um espaço millennial autorreflexivo: Arte Educação como Catalisador — Este artigo discute como o acesso dos alunos da geração milenial e pós-milenial à tecnologia e às redes sociais pode impactar grandemente suas interpretações de fenômenos sociais. Quando os alunos são expostos a um dilema desorientador nas redes sociais, por exemplo, reflexão crítica e ação são necessárias. Este artigo postula que a teoria de aprendizagem transformadora de Mezirow (1991), somada a exemplos de currículos de arte-educadores que envolvem alunos com a mídia digital, oferecem modelos instrutivos de como facilitar o processo de mudança de perspectiva com alunos de vários contextos culturais. Essa mudança ajuda a identificar e possivelmente transformar perspectivas individuais sobre eventos sociais, ampliando a visão crítica num contexto mais amplo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Teoria de Aprendizagem Transformativa. Arte-Educação. Millennials. Tecnologia Digital. Narrativas.

ABSTRACT — Visual images and worldview in a millennial space: education as a catalyst — This paper discusses how millennial and post-millennial learners' access to technology and social media can greatly impact their interpretations of social phenomena. It is when students are exposed to a disorienting dilemma on social media, for example, that critical reflection, and action are needed. This paper posits that Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning coupled with examples of art educators' curricula engaging students with digital media, is instructive of how learners worldwide can go through the process of perspective changing. This change helps to identify and possibly transform a person's perspective on social events and the larger context of their life.

KEY WORDS
Transformative Learning Theory. Art Education. Millennials. Digital Technology. Narratives.

> *The white nationalist organizers in Charlottesville used the same social media tools as everyone else. One professor argues that means we need to rethink how we approach the First Amendment (DIEP, August 15, 2017).*
> *There certainly were hate groups before the Internet and social media. [But with social media] It just becomes easier to organize, spread the word, for people to know where to go…On the other hand, social media has also lowered the cost for people to organize for civil protests…Now, with satellite phones and other technology, even in the most oppressive countries, it is often possible for news to get through. (DIEP, August 15, 2017)*

The above comments exemplify why it is imperative for educators to help millennials (born between 1980-1994, maybe) and post-millennials/Gen Z (born between 1995-2012, maybe) to drive social, cultural and educational change around

the world. With (in many cases) easy access to so many perspectives on a single event, teacher-facilitators and learners need strategies for transforming information into knowledge and meaning. Moreover, as students participate in their educations beyond high school they naturally have concerns about their next step into the work world. According to the findings of the 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey, "[y]ounger workers are increasingly uneasy about the future, pessimistic about the prospects for political and social progress, and harbor growing concerns about safety, social equality, and environmental sustainability" (PARMELEE, 2018).

So, how can education harness and use technology to enhance and facilitate human concerns and needs? Our goal here is to address this question by considering Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory (introduced by V. Daniel) as a means of reflecting on social-cultural dilemmas embedded in phenomena such as social media. T. Jackson's educator's narrative will also be used as an example of a strategy for transformative practice.

The current revolution

The Deloitte Millennial Survey "which explores the views of 10,455 millennials and 1,844 Gen Z respondents around the globe", (PARMELEE, 2018) points us to the significance of the Fourth Industrial Revolution or, Industry 4.0, on the lives of young learners: "Industry 4.0 is the label given to the gradual combination of traditional manufacturing and industrial practices with the increasingly technological world around us…[including such innovations as] the internet of things…to provide a truly productive future" (MOORE, 2018).

Although students might believe that their generation is the most innovative and most in need of major changes in educational practice, they are, rather, an enhanced reverberation of earlier life-changing revolutions. Students and teachers should take solace in knowing that change has brought us to this point of limitless possibilities.

Specifically, the three preceding revolutions were characterized by innovations that modernized industry (and educational practice), as follows; 1. steam and the first machines; 2. electricity, the assembly line, mass production and, 3. computers and the

beginnings of automation, (MARR, 2016). Many young learners are immersed in the fourth revolution, the Industry 4.0 technology environment. "Now, and into the future as Industry 4.0 unfolds, computers are connected and communicate with one another to ultimately make decisions without human involvement" (MARR, 2018, September 2). But should the dynamics of this current revolution prescribe the future of educational practice? Or, should teaching/facilitating and learning keep the goals of reflection, critical thinking and person-driven communication in the forefront while embracing techno-tools to enrich and support these goals? As Brown-Martin (2018, Jan 14) asks, "[H]ow can [governments, educators and parents]…prepare present and future generations to thrive in this transforming world [?]"

Students who embrace social media can get infinite amounts of information fast. Dependent on their communication choices, they can offer their opinions, find support for their own point of view, form virtual or natural world communities and, learn/teach new skills. They are also candidates for being misinformed, harassed and victims of unchastened attacks from strangers. Nevertheless, if we honor Rouse's (2012, November) definition of social media as the "collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration", it is a worthy educational tool capable of transforming the adult learner's perspective and ability to make meaning for their life.

Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)

While co-directing several study abroad trips to Brazil, I (V. Daniel) was struck by the pervasive student interest in the relationship between art education, social justice and the promise of social media across disparate populations. Similarly, college students at a Caribbean arts education conference focusing on millennials enthusiastically presented their case for needing technology based educational approaches that were more relevant to their learning and communication styles and social-cultural goals. Both groups were interested in the meaningfulness of educational tools and content to their lives. Toward the end of encouraging the coupling of technology with meaning making, Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) will be discussed.

Transformative Learning is an idealized model of adult learning that distinguishes between learners as receptacles of knowledge versus learners who are actively engaged through critical reflection and discourse to question assumptions, expectations, and context to achieve deeper meaning and new perspectives to guide their actions (Definition of Transformative Learning, nd). The two basic kinds of learning in the theory are instrumental (i.e., learning through task-oriented problem solving) and communicative (i.e., how individuals communicate their feelings, needs and desires) (CULATTA, 2018).

What is key here is that TLT offers educators and students guidance for interpreting experiences provided in the era of social media and determining if the experiences fit/misfit their worldview. “[T]ransformative learning is perspective transformation, a paradigm shift, whereby we critically examine our prior interpretations and assumptions to form new meaning - - - the “why”” (CULATTA, 2018). This perspective transformation is achieved through experiencing: (1) disorienting dilemmas, (2) critical reflection, (3) rational dialogue, and (4) action.

For our purposes here, each of the phases in Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning can be connected to *how* and *why* we partner critical thinking and introspection with technology in order to assist the learner in identifying their educational, social and cultural goals. Such a partnership is intended to encourage a transformative learning experience through which the learner “interpret[s] and reinterpret[s] their sense experience [and] is… central to making meaning and hence learning” (MEZIROW, 1991). The following section uses an example of a contemporary, newsworthy event, the Charlottesville rally/riot, that could create a “disorienting dilemma” for an individual. The example includes the use of TLT themes and phases for reflection and perspective changing that help to identify and possibly transform a person’s perspective on the event and the larger context of their life. This event was chosen because of its robust social media life and attendant polarizing social-cultural issues.

A disorienting dilemma

The Charlottesville rally/riot[1] (which resulted in three deaths and 38+non-fatal injuries), also known as the Unite the Right rally, Charlottesville riots, or A12, is the "disorienting dilemma"[2]. Wikipedia, an online source that is popular with students for community-authored definitions and descriptions, defines the event as:

> "A white supremacist, anti-Semitic, white separatist and neo-fascist rally that occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia from August 11 to 12, 2017. Protesters were members of the far-right and included self-identified members of the alt-right, neo-Confederates, white nationalists Klansmen, neo-Nazis and various militias. The marchers chanted racist and anti-Semitic slogans, carried semi-automatic rifles, swastikas, Nazi symbols (such as the Odal rune, Black Sun, and Iron Cross), the Valkrut, Confederate battle flags, Deus Vult crosses, flags and other symbols of various past and present anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic groups. Within the Charlottesville area, the rally is often known as **A12** or **8/12**. The organizers' stated goals included unifying the American white nationalist movement and to oppose removing a statue of Robert E. Lee from Charlottesville's Emancipation Park" (Wikipedia, Unite the Right rally).

This wiki article was a deep dive into social media with opportunities to investigate highly divergent points of view. Mezirow (1991) offers that if the Charlottesville rally/riot event caused disorientation, then perspective identification and change are possible.

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1 The Charlottesville rally/riot, was planned by the racist and fascist "Unite the Right" group. It was a protest against the removal of a statue of Confederate icon, General Robert E. Lee. There is a national, passionate debate about confederate monuments meant to honor Confederate leaders, soldiers or the Confederate states because they are considered by many to be icons of institutional racism, segregation and enslavement of African descended people... The Confederacy of 11 southern states seceded from the Union (later to become the United States) in 1860. The goal of these states was to preserve slavery. The secession and the institution of slavery were the main causes of the American Civil War between the southern and northern states from 1861-1865. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, there are 718 Confederate monuments and statues in the U.S. most of which were constructed between the 1890's and the 1950's (Aljazeera 28/08/2017).

2 Similar to US protests against monuments that glorify African American slavery and slavers, in Brazil, indigenous activists have contested Sao Paulo's *Monumento às Bandeiras* because it glorifies racist and colonial symbols. Specifically, the *bandeiras,* were 16th century Portuguese expeditions into the hinterlands of South America to capture and enslave indigenous people and to fight against *quilombo* settlements of African descended former slaves. Over time more Sao Paulo monuments depicting *bandeira*ntes (slavers) as heroic, weaponless, white explorers proliferated. In 2016, the *Monumento às Bandeiras* was covered in red paint along with the *bandeirante* Borba Gato sculpture that was covered in graffiti. Larson (2017) provides other comparisons of US and Brazilian protests including police brutality in predominantly Afro-Brazilian favela communities

An elaboration on the TLT principles (P) provided by Culatta (2018) and Transformative Learning (n.d.) includes questions (Q) created here to help teachers and students to move through the transformative learning process with the learning goal of identifying and adjusting their perspectives, and making meaning from knowledge about the Charlottesville rally/riot, as an example.

P1: The two kinds of adult learning are instrumental (e.g., Cause/effect) and communicative (e.g., feelings).

Q. *How are my actions and beliefs affected by identifying the cause and effect of this event? How is what I know and believe affected by my feelings about/experience with this event? Am I comfortable with my feelings about this event?* (*If a learner is comfortable with an experience, they are unlikely to engage in transformative learning.) Can blogs and personal narratives help me to identify the "facts" about this event?*

P2: In order for learning to occur, meaning structures (perspectives and schemes) must change.

Q. *What kinds of social media activities can help me to identify my perspectives so that I will be receptive to new information? Should I collaborate with others in identifying artists' interpretations of the event? What perspectives are the artists presenting and why?* In order for meaning structures to be understood, *reflection (i.e., critique of previously acquired (even in childhood) beliefs)* must occur. *As an adult, are my beliefs the same as they were in childhood? Should they be different? If so, why? Are there others who share my beliefs? If so, why?*

P3: Reflection about content, process or premises can cause change to meaning structures.

Q. *What are my assumptions? Am I willing to share them publicly? Are they well informed, biased, useful, harmful, or destructive? If I am uncomfortable with my beliefs, feelings and assumptions, what is my plan for changing them? What more do I need to know? Is there an opportunity to explore my beliefs and to*

create personal meaning by learning about what is important/meaningful to others and why? Should I create/join an online discussion that presents varying perspectives on the event so that others can comment on my perspective?

P4: "Learning can involve: refining/elaborating meaning schemes, learning new schemes, transforming schemes, or transforming perspectives" (Transformative Learning [Jack Mezirow]).

Q. *Can I identify online resources that I no longer agree with? Can I identify the reflective content of online sources related to this event? Can I participate in problem-based activities with other students that will help me to identify how changing my perspective on the event will improve my life and the lives of others? How can I express my perspective and beliefs through a collaborative creative activity?*

Thus, the intention is to normalize for students and teachers, behavior that pairs digital habits with self-reflection that can lead to openness to new ideas, philosophies and perspectives.

Art education as catalyst

Some of the curricula I (T. Jackson) design along with my experience as a certified distance learning instructor further lends to my understanding of how to integrate a transformative learning framework with digital technology. By collaborating and training other faculty members in their pedagogical practices; I have also observed that active learning techniques, fosters a sense of community, and falls in line with the characteristics of a liberal education model in which critical self-reflection is imperative.

Through teaching, instructional design and digital education tools, I've observed that art education programs and departments experience more positive student evaluations when professors implement digital content such as video instruction, social media, video games, vlogs, infographics, and interactive learning activities. I contend that as art education programs increase their offering of digital mediated experiences; art education professors should consider strategic pedagogical approaches that keep

the vision of the discipline in the foreground. For example, according to the National Art Education Association's vision statement, students of all ages benefit from comprehensive, balanced, and sequential learning in the visual arts… The power of the visual arts to enrich human experience and society is recognized and celebrated throughout the world (NAEA, 2018).

Ultimately, art educators must consider how they can effectively implement this vision of the discipline through visual images and digital spaces in which the process of developing a learning community is quite different from teaching in a traditional classroom setting with traditional pedagogical approaches.

Before discussing specific imaging examples that I have implemented in course curricula, it is important to establish the process by which I use digital tools, and social media spaces to implement transformative learning. With the understanding that adults have a unique capacity to become critically self-reflective (KING; KITCHENER, 1994; KEAGAN, 2000), I attach more specific teaching strategies for applying transformative learning in a digital age to Mezirow's (1991; 2003) theory:

1. **Provide opportunities for critical thinking** through providing content that introduces new ideas; students need the opportunity to engage with new content through journaling, dialoguing with other students, and critically questioning their own assumptions and beliefs.

2. **Provide opportunities to relate to others going through the same transformative process**. Transformation often happens in community as students bounce ideas off one another and are inspired by the changes friends and acquaintances make.

3. **Provide opportunities to act on new perspectives** – it is critical for teachers to provide opportunity for students to act on their newfound beliefs. There is some indication that true transformation cannot take place until students are able to actively take steps that acknowledge their new belief (digital narratives).

The goal here is to engage students in critical-dialectical discourse so that they can understand the positionality of their views as well as their peers according to differing experiences and adopted worldviews. The following curriculum addresses this goal.

How I came to integrate images and digital technology in my pedagogy: MeTelling Narratives Project

My teaching interest focuses on digital media literacy, for Popular Visual Culture and specific issues concerning the representation of black women within the African Diaspora. I teach students how to conduct narrative analysis through the use of digital media and various other education technology (eLearning) tools. Collectively, we examine the representation of the black female body in contemporary art, and film. From there, I ask students to construct digital counter-narratives that challenge black female stereotypes. Typically, I observe students making a connection between historic images of black women within the African Diaspora that are denigrating and celebratory, to contemporary visual representation of black women in the U.S. and how these multi-mediated narratives influence the experiences, and body politics of black women globally.

While teaching undergraduate students, I employed a three-step media literacy process. Through guided questions, students were introduced to new ideas, stemming from Africana Womanism theory and Black Feminist Theory, and investigated images of black women through media literacy in which they assessed, analyzed, and evaluated controlling images and narratives of black women (HILL-COLLINS, 2009; HUDSON-WEEMS, 1995) that have persisted strongly in colonial spaces and antebellum slavery in the United States. This first step of introducing new concepts provided participants with opportunities to critically think about the representation of black women's images. The second step of relating to others going through the same transformative process occurred once participants engaged in critical dialogue in which they discussed and sometimes challenged each other's interpretation of mediated messages and whether or not the images discussed were "controlling" or problematic. The third and final step, which provided students with the opportunity to act on new perspectives, involved participants writing poems, and short essays that focused on a particular theme or

stereotype about black women that persists in visual culture and using digital technology to create digital counter-narratives, called MeTelling Narratives.

These digital counter-narratives are examples of how students embraced new perspectives about the imaging of black women in visual culture. They also give some indication on students' ability to be critically self-reflective through the lens of new concepts. Overall, I merge theoretical concepts from Africana Studies and Digital Studies to empower students to be both critical thinkers and creative producers of a wide range of messages using image, language, and sound. Here is a visual example of a participant's skillful application of critical self-reflection through the making of a MeTelling Narrative that explores misogynoir.

Figura 1 – Example of a MeTelling Narrative participant's work

Fonte: TONEY, T. 2012.

At the center of my teaching, I ask students to create a digital footprint that is ethical, diverse and inclusive of underrepresented communities and ideas. I also ask students to share their worldview and explore others' views by participating in critical classroom discussion that extends to social media audiences.

Overall, my teaching on the impact images have on black women's identity construction and counter-narrative experiences in digital spaces aligns with liberal education learning objectives like "intercultural knowledge and competence" and information literacy. Projects like MeTelling Narratives are teaching students about what interactions and conversations are not appropriate within a particular cultural context. As an educator, I teach students to investigate how and why black women in

digital spaces are engaging others about their experiences and how they place culture and context at the core of transformative learning.

Conclusion

The main contention of this paper is that learners and particularly those who are exposed to social phenomena in digital spaces have an unlimited opportunity to experience transformative learning. Technology through the vehicle of social media has the power to connect people globally who otherwise might never have the opportunity to do so and to share cultures and diversity of thought. This is the promise of technology. However, the pitfalls of technology occur when shared social phenomena causes disorienting dilemmas among learners and they don't have the tools to critically examine their experiences with these pitfalls.

As students and teachers who navigate the multifarious digital world, we are bombarded with images and texts that challenge our understanding of what it means to be free thinkers who value our personal and collective narratives. Tech savvy movements focusing on lived experiences and social justice such as *mujeristas*[3] ("Mujerista":Definition-Drew University; Bryant-Davis, T. & Comas-Dias, L. [2016]), and Black Lives Matter[4] [blacklivesmatter.com; Day, E. (2015]) remind us that the prevalence of competing online messages requires us to have strategies for critical reflection. This is equally true for Brazilians whose millennial citizens most recently protested in the streets of Sao Paulo with raised cellphones in order to live-stream, photograph, and tweet their efforts to form what is perceived to be their own Tea Party[5]

[3] "Latina women living in the USA who are keenly aware of how sexism, ethnic prejudice and economic oppression subjugate them, use the term *mujerista* to refer to themselves and use mujerista theology to refer to the explanations of their faith and its role in their struggle for liberation" ("Mujerista": Definition-Drew University, 2018).

[4] "The *Black Lives Matter* Global Network is a chapter-based, member-led organization whose mission is to build local power and to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes" (Black Lives Matter, 2018).

[5] "The *Tea Party movement* is an American fiscally conservative political movement within the Republican Party. Members of the movement have called for lower taxes, and for a reduction of the national debt of the United States and federal budget deficit through decreased government spending. The movement supports small-government principles and opposes government-sponsored universal healthcare. The Tea Party movement has been described as a popular constitutional movement composed of a mixture of libertarian, right-wing populist,

and Occupy[6] movements against existing political parties thought to be corrupt (Washington Post, 2018). Through a conscious reflective process, Brazilian audiences can participate in transformative thinking that empowers participants and observers in the digital universe.

As art educators, we can effectively equip students to critically reflect on what they are experiencing in digital spaces since the narratives in these spaces are heavily visual and multilayered with images and text. When students are able to look critically at images and explore fundamental art education concepts such as context, design, meaning making, and cultural diversity, the implication is that these students are better prepared to be reflective and responsible global citizens.

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and conservative activism. It has sponsored multiple protests and supported various political candidates since 2009" (Wikipedia, 2018).

[6] The *Occupy movement* was an international progressive, socio-political movement against social and economic inequality and the lack of "real democracy" around the world. It aimed primarily to advance social and economic justice and new forms of democracy. The movement had many different scopes; local groups often had different focuses, but among the movement's prime concerns were how large corporations (and the global financial system) control the world in a way that disproportionately benefited a minority, undermined democracy, and was unstable" (Wikipedia, 2018).

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