

# Learning from the whirlpools of existence

Crises and transformative processes as complex and rhythmic phenomena

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This paper has already been published in the [European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults](#), Vol. 12, No. 3 (2021) : Learning in times of crisis.

**Abstract :** The aim of this paper is to problematize and enrich the use of the concept of crisis in adult education to theorize further its contribution to the study of transformative processes. This paper discusses first the implications inherent in the adoption of event-based and processual approaches to crises. It seeks then to nuance and problematize the ways in which the relationships between crisis, learning and (trans)formative processes are conceived in adult education, especially through transformative learning theory and biographical approaches. The reflection highlights the difficulty of capturing the fluidity of learning and (trans)formative dynamics. Inspired by Edgar Morin's paradigm of complexity and illustrated by examples taken from the COVID-19 pandemic, three principles are defined to help conceiving what structures, regulates and reorganizes such dynamics. The contribution concludes by emphasizing the importance of developing a critical awareness of the rhythms that shape educational processes.

**Keywords :** crisis, transformation, complexity, rhythm, Adult education, COVID-19

## Learning from the whirlpools of experience



Every crisis leaves traces that appear both through the regressions and the advances that emerge from it. In many regards, when we refer to the lessons learned and the transformations associated with the experience of a crisis, we are referring to its most striking effects, what emerges from it. However, from an educational perspective, the experience of a crisis cannot be reduced to the explicit marks it leaves. The outcome of a crisis depends indeed on all the activities deployed to contain, regulate, and transcend it, before, during and after the occurrence of a specific perturbation. These activities manifest themselves through processes that express the evolution of tensions (e.g., dilemmas, psychological distress, social conflicts) whose effects over time eventually lead to the emergence of specific transformations.

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