

Transformative Learning Theory—An Overview

This section of the monograph provides a brief overview of transformative learning theory from the perspective of Jack Mezirow. Also discussed are the conditions that need to be present, from his perspective, to foster transformative learning. Its intent is to provide a synthesis of its major premises, not an exhaustive discussion, that includes enough information from which to understand the implications and insights gained from discussing the various unresolved issues about transformative learning theory. This overview is followed by two alternative perspectives of transformative learning: Boyd's (transformative education) and Freire's (social transformation) that contribute to our understanding of transformative pedagogy.

Mezirow: A Rational Transformation

Transformative learning offers a theory of learning that is uniquely adult, abstract, idealized, and grounded in the nature of human communication. It is a theory that is partly a developmental process, but more as “learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (Mezirow 1996, p. 162). Transformative learning offers an explanation for change in meaning structures that evolves in two domains of learning based on the epistemology of Habermas’ communicative theory. First is *instrumental* learning, which focuses on learning through task-oriented problem solving and determination of cause and effect relationships—learning to do, based on empirical-analytic discovery. Second is *communicative* learning, which is learning involved in understanding the meaning of what others “communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, moral decisions, and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labor, autonomy, commitment and democracy” (Mezirow 1991a, p. 8). When these domains of learning involve “reflective assessment of premises . . . [and] of movement through cognitive structures by identifying and

judging presuppositions” (p. 5), transformative learning is taking place. Transformative learning attempts to explain how our expectations, framed within cultural assumptions and presuppositions, directly influence the meaning we derive from our experiences. It is the revision of meaning structures from experiences that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation.

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Perspective transformation explains the process of how adults revise their meaning structures. Meaning structures act as culturally defined frames of reference that are inclusive of meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. *Meaning schemes*, the smaller components, are “made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience” (Mezirow 1991a, pp. 5-6). They are the tangible signs of our habits and expectations that influence and shape a particular behavior or view, such as how we may act when we are around a homeless person or think of a Republican or Democrat. Changes in our meanings schemes are a regular and frequent occurrence. *Meaning perspective* is a general frame of reference, world view, or personal paradigm involving “a collection of meaning schemes made up of higher-order schemata, theories, propositions, beliefs, prototypes, goal orientations and evaluations” (Mezirow 1990, p. 2) and “they provide us criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate” (Mezirow 1991a, p. 44). Our frame of reference is composed of two dimensions, habits of mind and a point of view. “Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set” of cultural, political, social educational, and economic codes (Mezirow 1997, pp. 5-6). The habits of mind get expressed in a particular point of view: “the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation” (p. 6).

Meaning perspectives are often acquired uncritically in the course of childhood through socialization and acculturation, most frequently during significant experiences with teachers, parents, and mentors. They “mirror the way our culture and those individuals responsible for our socialization happen to have defined various situations” (Mezirow 1991a, p. 131). Over time, in conjunction with numerous congruent experiences, these perspectives become more ingrained into our psyche and changing them is less frequent. In essence, they provide a rationalization for an often irrational world, and we become dependent upon them. These meaning perspectives support us by providing an explanation of the happenings in our daily lives but at the same time they are a reflection of our

cultural and psychological assumptions. These assumptions constrain us, making our view of the world subjective, often distorting our thoughts and perceptions. They are like a “double-edged sword” whereby they give meaning (validation) to our experiences, but at the same time skew our reality.

Meaning perspectives operate as perceptual filters that organize the meaning of our experiences. When we come upon a new experience, our meaning perspectives act as a sieve through which each new experience is interpreted and given meaning. As the new experience is assimilated into these structures, it either reinforces the perspective or gradually stretches its boundaries, depending on the degree of congruency. However, when a radically different and incongruent experience cannot be assimilated into the meaning perspective, it is either rejected or the meaning perspective is transformed to accommodate the new experience. A transformed meaning perspective is the development of a new meaning structure. This development is usually the result of a disorienting dilemma due to a disparate experience in conjunction with a critical reappraisal of previous assumptions and presuppositions. It is this change in our meaning perspectives that is at the heart of Mezirow’s theory of perspective transformation— a world view shift. A perspective transformation is “a more fully developed (more functional) frame of reference . . . one that is more (a) inclusive, (b) differentiating, (c) permeable, (d) critically reflective, and (e) integrative of experience” (Mezirow 1996, p. 163). Although less common it can occur either through a series of cumulative transformed meaning schemes or as a result of an acute personal or social crisis, for example, a death of a significant other, divorce, a natural disaster, a debilitating accident, war, job loss, or retirement. Often these experiences are stressful and painful and can threaten the very core of one’s existence (Mezirow 1997). A perspective transformation can be better understood by referring to an example given by a participant in a recent study on transformative learning, describing his revised world view. The participant, Lobo, an American, describes his change in perspective in response to living in Honduras for 2 years as a Peace Corps volunteer:

I definitely see the world in a whole different light than how I looked at the world before I left. Before I left the states there was another world out there. I knew it existed, but I didn’t see what my connection to it was at all. You hear news reports going on in other countries, but I didn’t understand how and what we did here in the States im-

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pacted on these people in Honduras, in South America, Africa, and Asia. Since I did not have a feeling for how our

lives impacted their lives it was as if the U.S. were almost a self-contained little world. After going to Honduras I realized how much things we did in the States affected Hondurans, Costa Ricans. How we affected everyone else in the world. I no longer had this feeling the U.S. was here and everybody else was outside. I felt that the world definitely got much smaller. It got smaller in the sense of throwing a rock in the water creates ripples. I am that rock and the things I do here in the States affect people everywhere. I feel much more a part of the world than I do of the U.S. I criticize the U.S. much more now than I would have in the past. (Taylor 1993, p. 175)

Mezirow has identified 10 phases of perspective transformation based on a national study of women returning to college who participated in an academic reentry program after a long hiatus from school. The study involved in-depth interviews of 83 women from 12 programs in Washington, California, New York, and New Jersey (Mezirow 1978a,b). From the data, he inductively identified the following phases (Mezirow 1995, p. 50):

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning of a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisionally trying out new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

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Three common themes of Mezirow's theory are the centrality of experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse in the process of meaning structure transformation. It is the learner's experience that is the starting point and the subject matter for transformative learning (Mezirow 1995). Experience is seen as socially constructed, so that it can be deconstructed and acted upon. It is experience

that provides the grist for critical reflection. Tennant (1991) offers a description of using a learner's experience that seems most congruent with transformative learning:

[Shared] learning experiences establish a common base from which each learner constructs meaning through personal reflection and group discussion....The meanings that learners attach to their experiences may be subjected to critical scrutiny. The teacher may consciously try to disrupt the learner's world view and stimulate uncertainty, ambiguity, and doubt in learners about previously taken-for-granted interpretations of experience. (p. 197)

The second theme, critical reflection, based on Habermas' view of rationality and analysis, is considered by Mezirow the distinguishing characteristic of adult learning. Only in adulthood does one become aware of the "uncritically assimilated half-truths of conventional wisdom and power relationships . . . [and] come to recognize being caught in his/her own history and reliving it" (Mezirow 1981, p. 11). Critical reflection refers to questioning the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience. It often occurs in response to an awareness of a contradiction among our thoughts, feelings, and actions. These contradictions are generally the result of distorted epistemic (nature and use of knowledge), psychological (acting inconsistently from our self-concept), and sociolinguistic (mechanisms by which society and language limit our perception) assumptions. In essence, we realize something is not consistent with what we hold to be true and act in relation to our world. "Reflection is the apperceptive process by which we change our minds, literally and figuratively. It is the process of turning our attention to the justification for what we know, feel, believe and act upon" (Mezirow 1995, p. 46).

In the case of transformative learning, most significant to effecting change in one's established frame of reference (world view) is the critical reflection of assumptions (CRA). This is a critique of assumptions (e.g., habits of mind based on logical, ethical, ideological, social, economic, political, ecological, or spiritual aspects of experience) underlying a problem defined by a learner. Mezirow (1998) breaks critical reflection into a taxonomy: (1) critical reflection of assumptions (CRA), which focuses more on instrumental learning (e.g., critiquing a text) through objective reframing with the intent to improve performance; and (2) critical self-reflection of assumptions (CSRA), subjective reframing, which focuses on the psychological and cultural limitations of one's world view. It is through CSRA that we are freed from cultural distortions and constraints,

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allowing for open discourse. Therefore, it is critical self-reflection of assumptions (CSRA) that is most essential for the transforming of our meaning structures—a perspective transformation. A good example of how critical reflection can bring to light contradictions

in our practice emerges from an investigation of a teacher’s study group (Saavedra 1995). Elizabeth, the group facilitator, shares her reflections on why teachers do what they do:

I realized at one point in my career that I actually have theories. I had never realized that before. . . . There were instances where I was actually teaching based on the intuitions or theories that I had developed. Um, but there were times that I was just teaching completely uninformed, I was just adopting the theories that the publishers, or whoever, whatever materials I was using, had built into those, those materials. And, so throughout the day I was giving contradictory messages. I’m telling kids “I want you to write, and I want you to become writers and I want you to become creative writers.” And the next minute I’m teaching them skills in isolation acting as though children couldn’t write unless they learned them and so I’ve canceled out what I’ve done We think we are helping kids to develop writing, but we’re not. We think we’re pushing them, and it’s because we haven’t really thought through our theories, and we just kinda adopt activities and strategies. . . . (pp. 301-303)

The third theme of transformative learning theory is rational discourse. Rational discourse is the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed. However, in contrast to everyday discussions, it is used “when we have reason to question the comprehensibility, truth, appropriateness, (in relation to norms), or authenticity (in relation to feelings) of what is being asserted or to question the credibility of the person making the statement.” (Mezirow 1991a, p. 77). Discourse in transformative learning rest on the following assumptions:

- C It is rational only as long it meets the conditions necessary to create understanding with another;
- C It is to be driven by objectivity;
- C All actions and statements are open to question and discussion;
- C Understanding is arrived through the weighing of evidence and measuring the insight and strength of supporting arguments; and
- C The primary goal is to promote mutual understanding among others.

It is within the arena of rational discourse that experience and critical reflection are played out. Discourse becomes the medium for critical reflection to be put into action, where experience is reflected upon and assumptions and beliefs are questioned, and

where meaning schemes and meaning structures are ultimately transformed.

Perspective transformation provides a model of adult learning by explaining the process of how personal paradigms evolve and expand in adulthood. In essence, it offers an explanation for adult development, that of developing a greater adaptive capacity to capitalize and act on prior knowledge and experience through critical reflection. “Anything that moves the individual towards a more inclusive, differentiated permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse, aids an adult’s development” (Mezirow 1991a, p. 7). Transformative learning, according to Mezirow, reflects a process as well as an outcome of adult development. It is a process where meaning making becomes continually more clarified although it doesn’t have to follow clearly defined steps or stages. An example can be seen in the development of critical reflection, where Elias (1997) describes the transformation of mental capacities associated with cognitive development in response to and working through the mental exigencies of modern life:

First is the development of a “conscious I” capable of exercising critical reflection. Second is a transformed capacity for thinking, transformed to be more dialectical or systemic, thinking (for example) that perceives polarities as mutually creative resources rather than as exclusive and competitive options and that perceives archetypes as partners for inner dialogue. Third is the capacity to be a conscious creative force in the world, as expressed, for example, as the capacity to intervene in and transform the quality of discourse in a group or learning community. (pp. 3-4)

Mezirow also sees development as an outcome of the transformative learning process, such “that it is irreversible once completed; that is, once our understandings clarified and we have committed ourselves fully to taking the action it suggests, we do not regress to levels of less understanding” (Mezirow 1991a, p. 152). Furthermore, that outcome of the developmental process is a more inclusive and discriminating world view.

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Essential to promoting adult development is the practice of fostering transformative learning. Fostering transformative learning includes the most significant learning in adulthood, that of communicative learning. “Communicative learning involves identifying problematic ideas, values, beliefs, and feelings, critically examining

the assumptions upon which they are based, testing their justification through rational discourse and making decisions predicated upon the resulting consensus” (Mezirow 1995, p. 58). Mezirow believes that this is the central activity to be fostered by adult educators. Essential to successful fostering of communicative (transformative) learning is promotion of ideal conditions for rational discourse. The conditions include the following:

(a) have accurate and complete information; (b) be free from coercion and distorting self-deception; (c) be able to weigh evidence and assess arguments as objectively as possible; (d) be open to alternative perspectives; (e) be able to critically reflect upon presuppositions and their consequences; (f) have equal opportunity to (including the opportunity to challenge) question, refute, and reflect and to hear others do the same; and (g) be able to accept an informed, objective, and rational consensus as a legitimate test of validity. (Mezirow 1996, p. 171)

It is also important to note that the conditions operate under the supposition that the adult educator will make every effort to establish standards within the classroom that significantly reduce the influence of power, the deficit model associated with instrumental learning, and win-lose discourse.

In conclusion, Mezirow does not see transformative learning as an “add-on” educational practice or technique. He sees it as the very essence of adult education, such that the goal of adult education is “to help the individual become a more autonomous thinker by learning to negotiate his or her own values, meanings, and purpose rather than uncritically acting on those of others” (Mezirow 1997, p. 11). This perspective rests on the belief that there is inherent purpose, logic, and ideal associated with transformative learning theory. Significant learning involves the transformation of meaning structures through an ongoing process of critical reflection, discourse, and acting on one’s beliefs. It is the very logic that provides the rationale for educators to choose the best of practices for fostering transformative learning.

Alternative Perspectives of Transformative Learning

There is always some danger in recognizing just one theorist as the major contributor to the development of a particular concept or idea. In transformative learning, Mezirow has been the primary spokesperson and writer, having written two books and many

published articles on the topic of transformative learning over the last 20 years. Furthermore, most of the theoretical critiques and empirical studies have been in response to and framed by his work concerning transformative learning. However, it is important to note that other models of transformative education have contributed to this discussion as well, and need to be given some attention. More specifically, this means discussing briefly the work of Robert Boyd (Boyd 1991; Boyd and Myers 1988), who offers a model of transformative education based on analytical psychology, and Paulo Freire, who offers an emancipatory model of transformation. The intent is not only to recognize their contribution but, more important, to recognize how these different perspectives of transformative learning along with Mezirow's are shaped by their underlying assumptions about learning, self, and society. It is these underlying assumptions as well as their own, that adult educators need to become aware of in order to become effective practitioners of transformative pedagogy.

Robert Boyd: Transformation as Individuation

Boyd's model of transformation is grounded in the analytical (depth) psychology work of Carl Jung explored within the context of small group behavior. It is an inner journey of individuation, that lifelong process of coming to understand through reflection the psychic structures (ego, shadow, persona, collective unconscious, etc.) that make up one's identity. Individuation involves the discovery of new talents, a sense of empowerment and confidence, a deeper understanding of one's inner self, and greater sense of self-responsibility (Boyd 1991). Transformation for Boyd is defined as "a fundamental change in one's personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration" (Boyd 1989, p. 459). Only through a transformation can significant changes occur in individual psychosocial development. The central purpose of a perspective transformation is to free the individual from his or her unconscious content and reified cultural norms and patterns that constrain the potential for self-actualization. He

delineates a difference between transformative education (Boyd's term) and Mezirow's perspective transformation in several ways. Boyd's transformation is much more about coming to terms with the first half of one's life and a meaningful integration with the second half. In contrast to Mezirow, who focuses on cognitive conflicts experienced by the individual's relationship with culture, Boyd is much more focused on conflicts within the individual's psyche and the resolution among these entities that leads to a transformation.

Analytical psychology, in contrast to Mezirow's view of the ego as the central psychic player in eliciting one's perspective transformation, recognizes the role of the whole person, the Self as the total personality, inclusive of the ego as well as the collective unconscious in the transformative process (Boyd and Myers 1988). It offers a framework for exploring a perspective transformation beyond an ego-centered definition and the narrow confines of acquiring a greater sense of reason and logic to a more social-psychic definition. This is demonstrated in a study of how HIV-positive adults make sense of their lives (Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves 1998). The researchers found the participants' new perspective of making meaning of their HIV experience involved "making a contribution, experiencing a heightened sensitivity to life and people, and being of service" (p. 80).

Another study that illustrates this difference is Scott's (1991a,b) research on the transformative experiences of community organizers. She takes Boyd's concept of psychic development even further and found some of her participants experiencing structural change in the realm of a spiritual descent beyond the personal ego-centered (egoic) stages of development. "When one transcends his/her ego, collective needs, wants and desires represent a stronger force . . . [and the] group can serve to represent symbolically alternative thoughts, structure, directions, and images for what is appropriate in today's society" (p. 240). From the view of analytical psychology, a perspective transformation as Mezirow defines it stops at the personal level (egoic), which lies below the transpersonal level where "the individual's cognitive and perceptual capacities apparently become so pluralistic and universal that they begin to 'reach beyond' any narrowly personal or individual perspectives or concerns" (Wilbur 1986, p. 72). In essence, instead of becoming more autonomous as Mezirow purports, the individual develops a greater interdependent relationship with and compassion for society.

Several other studies, even though it was not their intent, seem to provide insight into a perspective transformation beyond an ego-centered definition. They reveal definitions inclusive of spirituality, a transpersonal realm of development (Cochrane 1981; Hunter 1980; Scott 1991a; Sveinunggaard 1993; Van Nostrand 1992), compassion for others (Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves 1996, 1998; First and Way 1995; Gehrels 1984), and a new connectedness with others (Gehrels 1984; Laswell 1994; Weisberger 1995).

The process of transformative education is quite different as well. Boyd sees the transformative journey not as a series of rational

problem-solving practices dependent on critical reflection, but as a process of discernment. Discernment is a holistic orientation leading to contemplative insight, personal understanding of seeing life in a relational wholeness. It is indicative of three distinct activities: receptivity (listening), recognition (recognizing the need to choose), and grieving (self-talk and emotional crisis). “As radically distinguished from Mezirow’s occasional reference to an individual’s feelings of discomfort and disorientation, transformative education identifies grieving as a critical condition for the possibility of a personal transformation” (Boyd and Myers 1988, p. 280). Grieving, “a significant loss, a loss of a loved one, of a place, of a time, or of a way of making meaning that worked in the past,” is the most integral to transformative learning (Scott 1997, p. 45). The process is intensely personal and extrarational, focusing on the internal and subjective experience, with an emphasis on open dialogue with the Self.

Concerning the fostering of transformative education Boyd sees its purpose as helping students come to recognize their “spirit”—“that abiding within the person is a truth, a knowledge, which is not separate from socio-economic, political, and other cultural influences, but transcends them” (Boyd and Myers 1988, p. 282). The adult educator is encouraged to practice two virtues, each one designed to arouse the spiritual energy necessary for self-reflection in learning throughout life. The first virtue, seasoned guidance, is that of an experienced mentor reflecting on their own journey with the intent to help guide others. The second virtue is compassionate criticisms, assisting students in questioning their own reality, facilitating the process of discernment, which ultimately reveals the present and creates a path for the future (Boyd and Myers 1988).

In closing, it is important to remember that Boyd’s view of transformative education is informed by depth psychology—exploring the role of the unconscious. (Dirkx, Cunningham, Hart, Mezirow, and

Scott 1993). It is through dialogue with the unconscious that transformation, individuation, is possible. Individuation is not the same as Mezirow's rational autonomous perspective; instead it is a transformation that involves coming to terms with hidden or latent aspects of one's personality, a movement from the personal, where ego consciousness is dominant (Mezirow's perspective), to the transpersonal where "the ego is a servant of the spirit" (Washburn 1988, p. 55). Failing to come to terms with the self, the rational side of human nature is vulnerable to the forces of the unconscious, unable to act on a new perspective.

Paulo Freire: An Emancipatory Transformation

Paulo Freire (1970) was a radical educational reformist from Brazil (Latin America), who portrayed a practical and theoretical approach to emancipation through education. His work is based on his involvement with teaching people who had limited literacy skills in the Third World, where he used an educational method that was such a threat to those in power he was exiled from Brazil in 1959. Freire wanted people to develop an "ontological vocation" (p. 12); a theory of existence, which views people as subjects, not objects, who are constantly reflecting and acting on the transformation of their world so it can become a more equitable place for all to live. This transformation, or unveiling of reality, is an ongoing, never ending, and dynamic process. Unlike Mezirow's personal transformation, Freire is much more concerned about a social transformation via the unveiling or demythologizing of reality by the oppressed through the awakening of their critical consciousness, where they "...[learn] to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 19, translator note). This awakening or kindling of one's critical consciousness is the consequence of his educational process. In Freire's (1970) words:

[The] more radical he [sic] is, the more fully he enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he can better transform it. He is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. He is not afraid to meet the people or enter into dialogue with them. He does not consider himself the proprietor of history or of men [sic], or the liberator of the oppressed; but he does commit himself, within history, to fight at their side. (pp. 23-25)

The latter quotation reflects most accurately the intent of his work, that of fostering an emancipatory transformative process. The process is *conscientização* or conscientization (Freire 1970), whereby the oppressed learn to realize the sociopolitical and economic con-

traditions in their world and take action against its oppressive elements. It is “the ability to exist in and with the world; i.e., a critical consciousness of what is happening in the world” (Scott 1996, p. 345). For Freire education is never neutral: “It either domesticates by imparting the values of the dominant group so that learners assume things are right the way they are, or liberates, allowing people to critically reflect upon their world and take action to change society towards a more equitable and just vision” (Merriam and Caffarella 1998, p. 9).

Like Mezirow, Freire sees critical reflection as central to transformation in context to problem-posing and dialogue with other learners. However, in contrast, Freire sees its purpose based on a rediscovery of power such that the more critically aware learners become the more they are able to transform society and subsequently their own reality. “Mezirow stops short of this view. Personal transformation is in Mezirow’s view, in and by itself, sufficient. This is why he can link himself conceptually to Freire (conscientization is critical reflection), but draws back at the concept of praxis” (Cunningham 1992, p. 185). For Mezirow, a transformation is first and foremost a personal experience (confronting epistemic and psychological distorted assumptions) that empowers persons to reintegrate (not questioning the dominant assumptions) or act on the world (confronting sociolinguistic distorted assumptions), if they choose. Similar to Mezirow, Boyd’s view of transformation reflects a psychological reintegration, “old patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting, which previously prevented growth, have finally been discarded” (Boyd and Myers 1988, p. 279). However, for Freire it is clearly a social experience: by the very act of transformation, society is transformed. There are only two ways for humans to relate to the world, that of integration and adaptation. Integration involves the critical capacity to act on the world as a Subject and adaptation is an Object, acted upon by the world.

Three broad concepts/methods, some of which are the most often alluded to by other educators and scholars, reflect his basic beliefs and practices about fostering an emancipatory transformation. First is his illumination of the domesticating effect of traditional education by teachers in their narrative “bank deposit” approach to teaching. Freire (1970) states that “education . . . becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes ‘deposits’ which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 58). It is as if the teacher is giving a gift of knowledge to the student, as if the student

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has nothing to contribute in return. Since the “banking” approach to adult education will not induce students (the oppressed) to reflect critically on their reality, he proposes a liberating education couched in “acts of cognition not in the transferal of information” (p. 67), a “problem-posing” (p. 70), and dialogical methodology.

A second concept that is at the core of this problem-posing approach of education is that of praxis. Praxis is the moving back and forth in a critical way between reflecting and acting on the world. The idea of reflection is the continual search for new levels of

interpretations with a new set of questions with the intent to critique former questions. Action happens in concert with reflection; it is a process of continually looking over our shoulders at how our actions are affecting the world (Scott 1996). Furthermore, praxis is always framed within the context of dialogue as social process with the objective of “dismantling oppressive structures and mechanisms prevalent both in education and society” (Freire and Macedo 1995, p. 383).

Third is Freire’s (1970) horizontal student-teacher relationship. This concept of the teacher working on an equal footing with the student seems couched in the Rogerian ideology, whereby the student-teacher dialogue is built upon a foundation of “love, humility, and faith...of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence” (pp. 79-80). This offers an educational atmosphere that is safe, where anything can be shared and talked about, an obvious setting for raising one’s consciousness and facilitating an emancipatory transformation.

Freire’s philosophy of education reflects an emancipatory perspective inherent of both a personal and social transformation of which neither can be separated. It is the combination of both the biography of the personal and that of the social that sets the stage for emancipation. “Transformational learning occurs when one grasps with growing insight the way biography [persona] intersects with the social structure, and the privilege and oppression of persons based on power” (Dirkx, Cunningham, Hart, Mezirow, and Scott 1993, p. 358). Furthermore, it is through the practice of critical reflection, problem-posing, and dialogue that transformative learning is fostered— accomplishing its primary objective of democratizing our social world.

Conclusion

The intent of providing alternative perspectives to transformative learning is not only to recognize others who contributed to the conception of transformative learning, but also to offer a broader viewpoint about the relationship among education and personal and social change. By exploring these different interpretations Mezirow's various theoretical premises becomes less amorphous and more concrete. He seems to sit in the middle between two models of change, one that emphasizes change associated with coming to terms with the Self and the other that emphasizes change associated with coming to terms with Self in relationship

to society. He tends to avoid or gives minimal attention to the deep analytical challenges associated with personal transformation, such as its inherent emotive nature, the emphasis on personal self-awareness, and the need to resolve past life issues. On the other hand he also sees transformation occurring in and out of a social action context, such that political action is a new choice associated with, but not necessarily a direct consequence of a more inclusive discriminating world view. It is Mezirow's middle-of-the-road position that provides "grist for the mill" in the next section of the monograph—that of exploring the unresolved theoretical and empirical issues of transformative learning theory.



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