Critical Theory and Transformative Learning: Rethinking the Radical Intent of Mezirow's Theory[1]

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Abstract

Mezirow's relies on the critical theory of Habermas to give his theory of transformative learning rigor. Yet critiques persist and focus on whether the theory has an adequate understanding of the social dimension of learning and whether it is overly rational. This paper addresses these issues and explores relevant ideas from Habermas and Honneth. Critical theory has evolved and Honneth's theory of recognition has implications for transformative learning. Following the communicative turn of Habermas, Honneth makes recognition and freedom key concepts that contribute to developing transformative learning theory. Intersubjectivity and recognition become the necessary preconditions for critical reflection, discourse, democracy and transformative learning. Freedom is also reconfigured and these ideas address the main critiques of transformation theory.

Key words: Transformative learning, critical theory, recognition theory, Habermas, Honneth

Introduction

Jefferson, Marx, Gramsci, Dewey and Paulo Freire all note that democratic participation is a means of self-development and produces individuals who are more tolerant of difference, sensitive to reciprocity and more self-reflective (Mezirow, 2003). According to Dewey democracy "necessarily emerges on the condition of an antecedent intersubjectivity of social life" (Honneth, 1998, p. 767). Democracy and education presuppose each other.

Mezirow (1981) links transformative learning with the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, a member of the Frankfurt School. His highly rational and abstract discourse and its rules influence transformation theory. Engaging in discourse requires the capacity to be critically reflective and the ability to engage in "critical dialectical discourse involving the assessment of assumptions and expectations supporting beliefs, values and feelings" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60). Though Mezirow was aware of the Frankfurt School through the work of Schroyer (1975) and Jay (1973) he never fully adopted the critical theory of Habermas and this may have given traction to some of the critiques of transformative learning theory.

The theory of transformative learning views learning as having individual and social dimensions (Cranton & Taylor, 2012) and critiques argue that transformation theory has an inadequate understanding of the social (Clarke & Wilson, 1991; Collard & Law, 1989, 1992; Newman, 1993). Cranton & Taylor (2012) identify this as a continuing issue prompting clarifications and further development of the theory by Mezirow (1989, 1991a, 1995, 1996). Critics assert that Mezirow's emphasis on the individual does not accurately represent the emphasis in Habermas's work. According to Mezirow, they misunderstand transformation

theory. This has prompted clarifications and further development of the theory (Mezirow, 2003). Transformation theory is built on two sets of assumptions. Firstly, there are humanistic and constructivist assumptions that focus on the individual as a unit of analysis (Cranton et al., 2012). Secondly, there are assumptions from critical theory that focus on the social as a unit of analysis (Brookfield, 2012; Mezirow, 1991b). Attempts have been made to address these comments (Fleming, 2014) and others argue that Mezirow was always convinced of the centrality of social justice (Rose, 2016).

Taylor & Cranton (2013) call attention to the continuing absence of theoretical developments in transformation theory. The high level of rationality, the demands of critical reflection, the developmental dividend of democratic engagements and the critiqued individualism of Mezirow's theory can be better understood by a more detailed engagement with the critical theory of Habermas. This paper explores how the theories of Habermas and Honneth have recently evolved, explores how this addresses critiques and enhances the theory of transformative learning.

What is Critical Theory?

Critical theory is an analysis of society intent on understanding how society is structured so that injustices and structural inequalities are understood as created and sustained by powerful people and systems. It has the defining characteristic that it is interested in changing this situation so that systems become more just. Horkheimer and Adorno along with Marcuse, Fromm and Benjamin (and others) gave the Frankfurt School a sound footing and they developed a body of scholarship that was not only a Marxist study of political and economic systems but included an integrated psychoanalytic analysis. One could only understand oppression, injustices and the willingness of people to agree to this by analysing both social systems and their dialectical relationship with the unconscious. The inner lives of people and their relationships are invaded by the exchange economy (Brookfield, 2005). Their critique also offers a vision of a world as it might be. For educators in this critical tradition (Freire) this is a learning project. We can learn our way toward a better and more humanizing future.

Habermas represents the second generation of the Frankfurt School and diagnoses the pathology of this age as distorted communication. He also contributes frequently to public debates in Germany. Few scholars operate on such a global stage (Müler-Doohm, 2016) and he is closely associated with efforts to make sense of democracy and its untapped possibilities. For him democracy is an always unfinished project. He proposes that any decision in society must be deliberated on freely and equally by all without being hindered or excluded by social inequalities. Bernstein calls him the "philosopher of democracy" (Bernstein, 1991, p. 207). We inherit this legacy in which reasoned discourse about the good life is once again possible, practicable and epistemologically legitimate.

What is Transformative Learning?

In the 1970s, according to Rose (2016), Mezirow held that adult learning involves more than the self-directed learning of Knowles and proposes instead that it be defined by the testing of assumptions. In a filmed interview (Bloom & Gordon, 2015) Mezirow connects his work with that of Marx, Freud, Freire, Habermas and Socrates and suggests that frames of reference be made subject to critical reflection. Mezirow relies on Dewey (1933) who defines reflection as a process of "assessing the grounds (justification) for one's beliefs" (p. 9) and

critical reflection as "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it tends" (Dewey in Mezirow & Associates, 1990, p. 5). Reflection includes making "unconscious assumptions explicit" (Dewey, 1933, p. 281) and establishing beliefs upon a "firm basis of reason" (p. 6).

Fingarette's *The Self in Transformation* (1963) that explores psychoanalysis, existentialism and religious thinking and is a source of Mezirow's concept of "meaning scheme" (pp. 21-29) has little to say about a social dimension. Mezirow leaves himself open to this same critique because of his selective use of Fingarette. A selective use of Habermas also leaves Mezirow open to critique; by utilizing some ideas from Habermas and ignoring others Mezirow leaves transformation theory open to the charge that it does not have an adequate social dimension.

We are meaning making beings (Mezirow et al., 1990) and learning is a process of utilizing prior experience to construe new or revised interpretations of one's experiences that in turn guide action. Occasionally, there arises a sense that things do not fit and that we may need to change how we construe meanings. Life events may prompt learning by suggesting a questioning of what has been taken for granted. When we wish to interpret an experience each one relies on existing ready-made meanings gathered in individual life experiences. These form constructs that are a combination of both individual life history and sets of ideas we learn from society and culture. These constitute a frame of reference or habitual sets of expectations that serve as tacit belief systems.

We accumulate new and better meanings by expanding or re-working existing meanings, by learning new ones or by transforming frames of reference. According to Mezirow transformative learning is;

> ...the process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of our psychocultural assumptions has come to constrain the way in which we perceive our world, of reconstituting that structure in a way that allows us to be more inclusive and discriminating in our integrating of experience and to act on these new understandings... (Mezirow, 1985, p. 22)

When frames of reference are experienced as not serving us well this may lead to a search for the genesis of these non-functioning frames; the search for new more functioning assumptions and acting on the basis of new freely accepted assumptions (Mezirow, 1991b). Frames of reference when transformed through critical reflection are characterized as being more inclusive; more discriminating of experience; more open; and more emotionally open to change in the future (Mezirow, et al., 1990). The phases of transformative learning are, according to Mezirow:

A disorienting dilemma;
Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame;
A critical assessment of assumptions;
Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
Exploration of options for new roles, relationships and actions;
Planning a course of action;
Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
Provisional trying new roles;

Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspectives. (Mezirow, at al., 2000, p. 22)

The first step towards transformation is experiencing a disorienting dilemma when a problem is experienced with well-established ways of making meaning. This results in emotional disturbance, a feeling of things not fitting, or as Dewey (1933) called it, an experience of perplexity: "thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road situation*, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives" (p. 11). Mezirow turned to a number of key ideas of Habermas (1971) in order to give his theory a sound theoretical base: Domains of learning including emancipatory learning; critical reflection and discourse.

Domains of learning

There are two kinds of learning that match the knowledge constitutive interests of Habermas (1971) - instrumental and communicative (Mezirow, 1991b). Instrumental learning involves control over the physical environment and includes the disciplines of empirical science. This learning involves a prediction about observable events that can be proved empirically. It is about learning "how to" rather than "why" things happen (Mezirow, 1985, p. 18). Communicative learning involves the ability to understand oneself and others and explores meanings behind communications. Humanities and social sciences are typical disciplines. Communicative learning is also taught differently to instrumental learning.

The most persuasive distortions in education result from our "assumption that all adult learning proceeds exactly as instrumental learning does" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 18). Much adult education has been (and continues to be) focused on how to facilitate instrumental learning and this is a focus of adult education in public policy discourse that valorizes lifelong learning (Fleming, 2011), an example perhaps of the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" (Whitehead, 1969, p. 93). His critique of instrumental reason or learning should not be misunderstood as diminishing their importance, complexity or usefulness.

Mezirow (1989) argues that emancipatory learning is no longer a separate domain of learning to instrumental and communicative learning and involves becoming aware of problematic assumptions in either instrumental or communicative learning. An emancipatory interest impels us "to identify and challenge distorted frames of reference" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 87) through critical reflection. Emancipatory learning is transformative learning.

Critical Reflection and Discourse

The twin requirements for transformative learning are critical reflection and discourse (Mezirow, 1996). Critical reflection is conducted through discourse which is the kind of discussion in which every member is free to engage - the only force at play being the force of the better argument. Habermas outlines rules for such discourse that Mezirow adopts (1991b). Participants must have;

full accurate and complete information; freedom from coercion and distorting self-deception; openness to alternative points of view: empathy and concern about how others think and feel; the ability to weigh evidence and assess arguments objectively; greater awareness of the context of ideas and, more critically, reflectiveness of

assumptions, including their own; an equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse; willingness to seek understanding and agreement and to accept a resulting best judgement as a test of validity until new perspectives, evidence or arguments are encountered and validated through discourse as yielding a better judgement. (Mezirow, et al., 2000, pp. 13-14)

Discourse is a form of specialized dialogue that is involved in searching for a common understanding and assessment of an interpretation or belief in order that actions may be coordinated in pursuit of respective aims (Mezirow, et al., 2000). Rationality for Habermas means that there is a testing of validity claims. Like critical reflection, discourse is a demanding activity for participants and requires emotional maturity, empathy, awareness, an ability not to be adversarial in discussions and to think or hold different apparently contradictory thoughts at the same time. It does not involve winning or losing and emphasizes consensus building – which may not be always possible (Mezirow, et al., 2000).

Borrowing from Habermas, Mezirow (1991b) indicates that in transformative learning it is the lifeworld that is transformed. The lifeworld is "a vast inventory of unquestioned assumptions and shared cultural convictions, including codes, norms, roles, social practices, psychological patterns of dealing with others and individual skills" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 69).

Habermas develops the concepts of colonization and uncoupling to describe the relationship between system and lifeworld in capitalist society. Problems arise when the system, constructed to serve our technical interests, invades the practical domain of the lifeworld and intervenes in the processes of meaning-making among individuals and communities in everyday life. The lifeworld, according to Habermas (1987), is colonized by the functional imperatives of the state and the economy, characterized by the cult of efficiency and the inappropriate deployment of technology. The core of Habermas's critique of capitalism is that the public sphere and public discourse have been reduced by the activities of politicians, advertisers and the media in general. If the economic and political-legal systems have become insensitive to the imperatives of mutual understanding on which solidarity and legitimacy of social order depend, the solution, according to Habermas, is to revitalize autonomous, self-organized public spheres that are capable of asserting themselves against money and power. Not only does the lifeworld need to be defended but the state and capitalism need to be "socially tamed" (Habermas, 1987, p. 363).

The task of a democratic civil society and of transformative adult education is to decolonize the lifeworld and address the consequences of an uncoupled system and lifeworld (Habermas, 1987). Communicative action, involving the transformation of society through specific kinds of free open democratic discourse, is exactly the condition necessary for transformative learning. This alignment and coming together gives transformation theory a firm connection to critical theory. Habermas in *Legitimation Crisis* (1975) and later with his colleague Karl Otto Apel proposes that discourse is an essential element of critical theory and a core activity of democracy. Mezirow makes it the core activity of transformative learning. It is these connections between communicative action, discourse, democracy and transformative learning that link transformation theory and critical theory.

Democracy

Too often in society, distorted and distorting ideologies reinforced by social institutions foster dependency relationships that constrain effective participation in democracy (Mezirow,

1985). In quoting Geuss (1981), Mezirow underlines the critical theory credentials of his theory. "The retention of a delusion depends on one being in ignorance or having false beliefs about the function the delusion fulfills" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 146). A false consciousness may stabilize and legitimize domination, hinder social progress or material production and also disguise social contradictions. The real needs and best interests of people may be distorted and hidden by power and ideology and this Mezirow insight accurately reflects critical theory as outlined by Geuss (1981).

If one wants to change established and repressive social institutions (as distinct from emancipation from neurotic or subjective repression) we require more than a change of consciousness, we require lengthy and difficult courses of political action. Facilitating transformative learning must include facilitating both individual and collective action (Mezirow, 1985). "Perspective transformation is a group process" (Mezirow, 1991b, p. 185) and the interactions of discourse place it firmly in the domain of the social rather than the individual. This moves this theory of learning significantly closer to a critical theory.

Adult educators will argue that grass-root movements, many self-help groups as well as classrooms where participatory research is conducted and collaborative enquiry is pursued are examples of discourse. Programs of transformative learning in organizations attempt the same goal by alerting the system to issues and problems of motivation and legitimation that are symptoms and consequences of uncoupling the system and lifeworld. Habermas (1996) places discourse at the center of democratic theory, conceived as a means of resolving disputes, enabling collective actions and also as a measure and justification of democratic institutions.

These ideas point to a dual agenda for transformative education. Firstly, it involves the strengthening of the lifeworld against colonization by the system. Secondly, it involves taking into the system a commitment to fostering critical reflection and learning. These ideas from Habermas inform transformation theory and lead us to conclude that transformation theory is grounded in and infused with a sense of the social, reminiscent of Dewey's affirmation that democracy is "primarily a mode of associated conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 1954, p. 87).

Who is Axel Honneth?

Axel Honneth once a student of Habermas, and now Director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and Professor at Columbia University, New York, sets out to reinterpret critical theory by interpreting the distorted communications of Habermas as disrespect. The communicative turn of Habermas (1987) becomes the recognition turn of Honneth (1995) and damaged recognition is the pathology to be overcome, rather than distorted communication. He continues to assert that critical theorists, in spite of differences among themselves, all agree that the living conditions of "Modern capitalist societies produce social practices, attitudes, or personality structures that result in a pathological distortion of our capacities for reason…They always aim at exploring the social causes of a pathology of human rationality" (Honneth, 2009, p. vii). His reimagining of emancipatory philosophy foregrounds a theory of intersubjectivity and of recognition as crucial mooring points for the future of critical theory.

Honneth's critical theory sets out to identify experiences in society that contain "system-exploding energies and motivations" (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 242) in pursuit of freedom and justice. Denials of recognition that result in indignations, guilt and shame drive social struggles for recognition and social freedom (Honneth, 2014). This emphasis on

recognition is consistent with the assertion of Habermas that "Individuality forms itself in relations of intersubjective acknowledgement and intersubjectively mediated self-understanding" (1992, pp. 152-153).

Following Mead (1934) he holds that by taking the perspective of others towards oneself one can begin to construct a sense of self, with beliefs, desires, values and needs. These perspectives of others are shaped by culture and life history and by internalizing these individuals grows. Later, as socialized adults, one is capable of becoming reflexive of inherited values; can evaluate and critique them; decide on their justification and adequacy, and alter them in the light of reflection. This is reminiscent of what Mezirow describes as the process of transformation.

Honneth argues that the struggle for recognition, based on the need for self-esteem and the experience of disrespect, also explains *social* development. "It is by the way of the morally motivated struggles of social groups - their collective attempt to establish, institutionally and culturally, expanded forms of recognition - that the normatively directional change of societies proceeds" (Honneth, 1995, p. 92). Social change is driven by inadequate forms of recognition and internal (psychic) conflict leads to social change. In this way the social and personal are connected.

This moves the debate about emancipation beyond the perceived highly cognitive and rational interests of Habermas toward a complementary theory of intersubjectivity. This has the potential to resolve problems in transformation theory as to whether learning is an individual or social phenomenon. It also implies that the perceived disconnect between the individual and the social dimension in transformation theory can be reconstructed by asserting that not only is the personal political but the political is personal (Honneth, 2014). Transformative learning becomes both personal and social (Fleming, 2014). Self-determination, self-realization and autonomy can only be achieved through interpersonal relationships (Honneth, 1995) and one's private relationships of love and attachment are a precondition for participation in public life, democracy and transformative learning. Without mutual recognition there can be no critical reflection.

Transformative learning and communicative action are more than the following of linguistic rules of discourse (Habermas, 1987) and involve mutuality and intersubjectivity (Honneth, 1995). The antidote to being too individualistic lies in critical theory as articulated by Habermas and Honneth and this recognition turn in critical theory has implications for transformative learning. At the level of families, recognition is given and received in the attachment experiences between infant and the adult carer where the carer recognizes the feelings of the child and under the influence of an empathetic response the child grows and develops (Fleming, 2016).

Honneth outlines three forms of relating to oneself, the first of which is <u>self-confidence</u> - established and developed in relationships of friendship and love. If one experiences love an ability to love one's self and others is developed. One becomes capable of forging an identity by being recognized by others, without which it is not possible to become aware of one's own uniqueness and develop a positive image of one's abilities. If this essential ingredient of development is not available, or a negative message about self-worth is given, the outcome is a potential missing piece in the personality that may seek and find "expression through negative emotional reactions of shame, anger, offence or contempt" (Honneth, 1995, p. 257).

The second type of relationship to self involves <u>self-respect</u>, when a person in a community of rights is recognized as a legally mature person. One is then accepted as having an ability to participate in the discussions of the institution concerned, e.g., state or organizations. Respect is shown to others by relating toward them as having rights. The rights to student loans or disability services are examples.

The experience of being honored by the community for one's contribution through work leads to <u>self-esteem</u>, the third form of self-relating. People with high self-esteem will mutually acknowledgement each other's contribution to the community. These forms of recognition constitute Honneth's version of the good life as they provide the conditions for successful identity development. They provide clarification of the highly rational theories of both Habermas and Mezirow as they reveal the intersubjectivity presupposed by rationality.

There are three corresponding forms of disrespect (Honneth, 1995). If people are denied rights their self-respect may suffer as a consequence of the "mal-distribution of recognition" (Huttunen, 2007, p. 428). Disrespect harms people because it "injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively" (Honneth, 1995, p, 131). If rights are denied self-respect may suffer. If peoples' ways of life are not respected damage is done to their self-esteem. Abuse, insults, ignoring people are not only unjust but damage self-understanding and identity (Honneth, 1995). Gay marriage offers potential for such recognition and may enhance both individual development and social freedoms.

Honneth thus brings private matters to the center of sociological attention. Social change is driven by inadequate forms of recognition. His theory of recognition establishes a link between the social causes of experiences of injustice and the motivation for emancipatory movements (Fraser and Honneth, 2003). Internal conflicts lead to social change and we see in Honneth's iteration of critical theory the social and personal are connected. Internal conflicts drive transformative learning too – through disorienting dilemmas. Internal conflicts (dilemmas) prompt transformative learning.

The Freedom Turn of Honneth

These ideas are of particular interest to educators looking for new ways of expressing possibilities for transformative education – counter to dominant neoliberal imperatives. But Honneth goes beyond Habermas by seeking a broader vision of democracy involving not only the political sphere but emancipated families and socialized markets (Honneth, 2014). The realizations of freedom in any of these areas depends on its realization in the others as democratic citizens, emancipated families and ethical markets "mutually influence each other, because the properties of one cannot be realized without the other two" (Honneth, 2014, p. 330-1). This is really a reworking of Hegel.

The most important sphere of social freedom is what Honneth (2014) calls the "We" (p. 253) of democratic will formation. This leads him to his theory of democracy where democratic interactions enable citizens to make their lives and conditions better through a process of discourse or democratic will formation. This suggests that learning (and teaching) for the development of this "We" of democratic discourse may be a vital and necessary task of transformative education. Identity development is not merely an individual task but necessarily involves a social dimension.

From the first sentence of *Freedom's Right* Honneth (2014) states that freedom is the key value of modern life;

> Of all the ethical values prevailing and competing for dominance in modern society, only one has been capable of leaving a truly lasting impression on our institutional order: freedom, i.e. the autonomy of the individual.…all modern ethical ideals have been placed under the spell of freedom…. (p. 15)

Freedom involves inhabiting a space where social life can be better. As one might anticipate, individual and social freedom are connected – and not in some vague or superficial way but essentially. Places such as work, friendships, family and laws, are all justified only if they promote, support and bring about a free society for all. Education and the right to education (though not referred to by Honneth) are part of that emancipatory project. Importantly for this study, Honneth reorients critical theory to focus on freedom rather than on recognition (Honneth, 2014). The highly rational and perceived individualism of transformative learning is now potentially more socially oriented.

Discussion and Conclusion

Habermas has had relatively little traction in education apart from a few (Brookfield, 2005; Fleming, 2014) and the links between Honneth and education are even fewer, apart from Brown & Murphy (2012), Huttunen (2008) and Murphy & Brown (2012). Transformative learning theory as understood by Mezirow has followed the communicative turn of Habermas (Mezirow, 1991b) and we now follow the recognition and freedom turns of Honneth. Before that the full implications of linking Habermas with transformative learning are worth exploring.

Habermas Ideas not adopted by Mezirow

Some ideas from Habermas have not been integrated with transformative learning, in particular his critique of capitalism. Habermas (1996) links the concept of a public sphere with that of civil society to provide an account of how control can be exercised over markets and bureaucracies. The public sphere or public discussion has been reduced by the activities of politicians, advertisers, public relations and the media in general. Civil society operates on the basis that the government is not fully representative of the people. There is a democratic deficit - a gap between actual democratic practices and the ideal. The feminist movement, for example, has always identified a democratic deficit and bias in the system world and global social movements are expressions of indignation at this deficit whether on Wall Street, on Barcelona's Plaça de Cataluña or Syntagma Square in Athens.

Civil society has the dual function of ensuring that those who exercise power do not abuse it and of transforming the system to regenerate more democratic practices. The quality of democracy ultimately depends on the existence of the public sphere, on people's intelligent involvement in politics and on organizations and associations which help form opinions through discourse. A vibrant civil society is essential for democracy. The conviction that free, open, public discussion has a transformative function is central to Habermas's thinking. The way to reach a true understanding of people's needs and interests is to engage in democratic debates in which these needs are shared and in discourses, clarified and transformed. Transformative education has a clear mandate to work in the seams and at the boundaries of systems to humanize and transform them so that they operate in the interests of all. Mezirow believed that effective learners in an emancipatory, participative, democratic society - a learning society

- become a community of cultural critics and social activists (Mezirow, 1995) and the dichotomy of individual and society is transcended by an epistemology of intersubjectivity. Transformation theory asserts that the dichotomy between individual and social development is a spurious one for educators.

Transformative education has as its normative mandate the preservation of a critically reflective lifeworld. Critical theory holds out the promise of enabling us to think of all society as a vast school. Habermas addressed a multiple audience of potential transformative agents such as journalists, who emerge from the public with a critical mandate. He urged them to "understand themselves as the mandatary of an enlightened public whose willingness to learn and capacity for criticism they at once presuppose, demand, and reinforce" (Habermas, 1996, p. 378). It might be a useful starting point for defining the role of a transformative educator as located in the same public space, helping adults decolonize the lifeworld through democratic, critical discourses and transforming systems. There is a tradition in transformative education of working for more discursive structures in institutions. For example, Marsick, Bitterman, and van der Veen (2000) propose ways of making transformative learning happen in systems, organizations, institutions and communities so that efficiency is not hindered but enhanced, motivation increased and crises avoided or resolved.

Habermas offers a social critique with which to analyze the dominance in education of technique and instrumental rationality. As a result of such critique, the emphasis shifts from prioritizing how to get things done to realizing genuine democracy. Education would be redefined as an exercise in democracy, that teaches democracy and aims to reproduce more democracy in classrooms, communities, work places and society. These ideas from Habermas are those that could inform transformation theory and lead us to conclude that transformation theory is grounded in and infused with a sense of the social. These ideas point to a dual agenda for transformative education. Firstly, it involves the strengthening of the lifeworld against colonization by the system. Secondly, it involves taking into the system a commitment to fostering critical reflection and critical learning and that this places the social at the center of transformation theory.

Honneth and Transformative Learning

In order to engage in the critical discourse associated with transformative learning we can borrow from Honneth and assert that the formation of democratic discussions requires three forms of self-relating. We need caring individuals (teachers) and these are best produced through and by those with self-confidence. It requires recognition of the reciprocal nature of legal rights and, as one might anticipate, a person who possesses self-respect is better able to recognize the rights of others. And thirdly, a democratic discursive society requires the reciprocal recognition provided through work and solidarities.

This "recognition turn" suggests strongly that the high rationality required by transformative learning is "softened" by this understanding of the interpersonal recognition that underpins democratic discourses in learning environments. Teaching might usefully address the struggles for recognition as motivations for learning. Without altering the importance of communicative action or of critical reflection for transformative learning there is now the possibility of reframing transformation theory so that rational discourse is seen as based on an interpersonal process of support and recognition that builds self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Mezirow (and Habermas) see democratic participation as an

important means of self-development that produces individuals who are more tolerant of difference, sensitive to reciprocity and better able to engage in discourse (Mezirow, 2003). This recognition turn is a precondition for rational discourse without losing rigor or the ambition to remain connected to the emancipatory agenda of critical theory.

The idea that learning is individual <u>or</u> social can be reframed as a fundamentally intersubjective process of mutual respect and recognition. These relations of mutuality are preconditions for self-realization, critical reflection and transformative learning. Recognition and emancipation are connected. Recognition becomes the foundation on which communicative action, emancipatory learning and social change are based. This implies that learning, whether in transformative learning or other learning settings, is best supported by interactions that are not only respectful but that explicitly recognize the individual worth of each individual along with the aspirations and dreams that prompt their struggles for recognition. Transformative learning can in this way escape the charge of being overly rational.

The process of transformative learning commences with a disorienting dilemma and includes a moment where individual problems become identified with major/significant social issues (Mezirow, et al., 2000). This is akin to the understanding that perplexity is the beginning of knowledge (Dewey, 1933). In Mezirow's work this perplexity normally involves a disconnect and discomfort between old inadequate frames of reference and the possibility offered by new ones. The struggle for recognition can be interpreted as a disorienting dilemma. It motivates the search for new meaning schemes and identities and is a form of perplexity. The dilemma involves whether to stay in a world circumscribed by old experiences of misrecognition or respond to the struggle to be recognized and acknowledged through learning.

Another stage of the transformative process involves making connections between individual problems (that may have prompted learning) and broader social issues. It is now clear that personal problems are intimately and necessarily connected to broader social issues. This is a philosophically important and essential step in interpreting the world that cannot be understood properly without both personal and political perspectives being taken into account. The personal is indeed political but the political is also personal and transformative learning necessarily involves making these connections. At an obvious level, transformative learning requires the ability to perceive the world in this way – the personal and social are connected.

Emancipation and Adult Learning

Emancipation is the aim of transformative learning. Transformative education now becomes a learning project with the practical intent of increasing freedom, justice, care and equality in the spheres of family, law and work. Transformation is not just of the individual but also of society. It is important to attend to teaching for transformation as a process of mutual recognition between teacher and learner. Teaching that is informed in this way has the potential to strengthen identity development. With the current emphasis on functional learning, competency and behavioral outcomes in education, and a neoliberal inspired valorization of the market as the ultimate supplier of all needs, these ideas take seriously the contribution of intersubjectivity as important for teaching, learning and transformation. It is an antidote to dominant models. The motivation to engage in learning becomes less economic, functional and instrumental and more communicative, social, potentially transformative and emancipatory. This is achieved not just by an emphasis on critical reflection but on the always presupposed imperative of recognition.

Adults frequently describe their engagements with adult education (or returning to college) as leading to increased self-confidence. This is supported by a recent EU funded research project which found that non-traditional students entering higher education are in pursuit of recognition (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014). The theory of recognition allows us to expand the substance of this empirical claim and state that these experiences involve achieving a new learner identity and are transformative (Fleming, 2018; Fleming, Finnegan & Loxley, 2017).

If transformative learning is to remain a living theory it must always remain open to being reconfigured and opportunities for elaboration continue. The project is always incomplete As a consequence of engaging with Habermas and Honneth the idea that transformation theory is without an adequate understanding of the social dimension of learning or that it is overly rational gets transcribed into a theory that relies on interpersonal interactions of recognition. This in turn is the aim of democracy and emancipation for this age.

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