CHAPTER 2

Transformative Learning and Critical Theory: Making Connections with Habermas, Honneth, and Negt

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Since the theory of transformative learning was published (Mezirow, 1978; Mezirow & Marsick, 1978), a significant body of scholarship and research has been developed and the theory merits its title as a living theory in progress (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow borrowed concepts from Jürgen Habermas in order to build a theoretical base (Mezirow, 1981). With recent iterations of critical theory by Honneth and Negt, this chapter explores the potential of their ideas for developing a critical theory of transformative learning—one that would avoid becoming rather conventional and politically neutral.

Collard and Law (1989) and Clarke and Wilson (1991) critiqued transformation theory as overly concerned with individual change. Newman (1994) forcefully argued that Mezirow was not concerned with equalizing

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power relations in society and stripped the theory of its potential for social transformation. Hart (1990), Cunningham (1992), and Tennant (1993) make similar critiques. More recently, Hoggan et al. (2017) identify a certain "stuckness" in the theory as critiques are often repeated without adding to the debate (p. 49). All reinforce the idea that the missing social dimension in transformative learning remains problematic. Collard and Law (1989), who were students at the time, acknowledged Mezirow's comments on their work (p. 99). Such studies have always prompted debates, clarifications, and further development of the theory particularly by Mezirow (HYPERLINK "sps:refid::bib35|bib37|bib38|bib40") who emphasized the connection between transformation and social action while (Mezirow, 1953, 1997) always made a distinction between fostering critically reflective learning and social action.

In order to develop a critical theory of adult learning, Mezirow (1981) utilized key ideas of Habermas. Though Mezirow's approach was imaginative and original, critiques emerge from his selective borrowing from Habermas. In a problematic argument, Mezirow (1981) states that:

> As educators, we need not concern ourselves with the philosophical question of whether Habermas has succeeded in establishing the epistemological status of the primary knowledge-constitutive interests with categorically distinct object domains, types of experience and corresponding forms of inquiry. (p. 72)

This also led Mezirow to not fully utilize other useful ideas from Habermas including the demise of the public sphere and the capacity of civil society as a location for decolonizing the lifeworld. As a result, critiques gained traction and this hindered the ability to address them.

This chapter is based on the idea that critiques may stand or fall but should not be (re)asserted without rethinking the critical theory foundations and potentials that are partially but not comprehensively exploited by transformative learning—and its critics. Allies in this study are Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Oskar Negt who help build a more complete critical theory of transformative learning.

Frankfurt School: Habermas, Honneth, Negt

The Institute for Social Research, usually called the Frankfurt School, was formed at the Goethe University of Frankfurt in the 1920s. It engages

in an interdisciplinary research study of how capitalism and injustices in society can be explained and ways sought to take emancipatory actions. Philosophy, sociology, and psychology were explored as interdisciplinary contributions by Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse—who with Fromm, Benjamin, and others developed a body of scholarship that included an integrated psychoanalytic analysis. One could only understand oppression by analyzing both social systems and their dialectic relationship with the unconscious. This classical project of critical theory evolved with varying but parallel trajectories by Habermas, Honneth, and Negt. All are interested in social justice, reason, truth, and democracy and agree that philosophy aims at the "practical transformation of the existing social conditions" (Habermas, 1981, p. 469).

Jürgen Habermas (2008) is the most widely known member of the Frankfurt School who wrote that "the public sphere as a space of reasoned communicative exchanges is the issue that has concerned me all my life" (pp. 12–13). He proposes that any decision in society must be deliberated on freely and equally by all without hindrance or exclusion by social inequalities. He argues that reasoned discourse about the good life is possible, practicable, and epistemologically legitimate.

Axel Honneth is Director of the Frankfurt School and Professor at Columbia University, New York. He reorients critical theory by interpreting the communicative turn of Habermas as a recognition turn (Honneth, 1995). Damaged recognition motivates social change—rather than distorted communication. For Honneth (2009), critical theorists, in spite of their differences, 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 (p. vii).

He reinterpreted oppression as a form of misrecognition and emancipation could be achieved through the struggle for recognition (Fleming, 2016). His reimagined emancipatory philosophy foregrounds a theory of recognition and intersubjectivity as crucial mooring points for critical theory.

Oskar Negt studied with Horkheimer and Adorno, was assistant to Habermas in 1962, and is a prominent scholar at Leibniz University Hannover that Illeris (2002) asserts is an "extension of the Frankfurt School" (p. 147). With a long history of involvement in critical and emancipatory worker education, he rethinks the role of experience making it

central to his pedagogical agenda. He may be unique in European critical theory, certainly as a Frankfurt scholar, to have published his autobiography (Negt, 2016, 2019). These Frankfurt School scholars help progress Mezirow's theory of transformative learning.

Mezirow and Habermas

Transformation theory relies on Habermas (1971) for understanding domains of learning (instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory), critical reflection, and discourse. These give transformation theory a firm theoretical base and Mezirow (1981) proposes that transformation theory is a critical theory of adult learning.

Domains of Learning

In addition to instrumental and communicative learning, Mezirow (1991) added emancipatory learning to form distinct learning domains. Emancipatory learning involves becoming aware of problematic underlying assumptions in either instrumental or communicative learning. Emancipation (Mezirow, 1991) is from "libidinal, institutional or environmental forces which limit our options and rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted as beyond human control" (p. 87). For Honneth (1995), the emancipatory interest is the struggle for recognition, and for Negt, it is discovered through the experiences of workers (Negt & Kluge, 1993).

Critical Reflection

For Habermas (1971), critical self-reflection is not just philosophical speculation but a form of rationality, equal in status to the reason of sciences (logic) and humanities (hermeneutics). When Mezirow borrowed these ideas, he (unknowingly?) placed the intersubjective basis for critical reflection at the center of transformative learning. His thinking (1971) was grounded in the work of Blumer and G. H. Mead who are important sources of ideas on the intersubjective nature of learning and development. The idea that learning is individual, as argued by critics of transformation theory, seems to be also contrary to the Habermas view that psychoanalysis is an intersubjectively practiced form of self-reflection.

Discourse

In discourse, every member is free to engage and the only force at play is the force of the better argument and is the kind of discussion that characterizes democracy. Habermas idealistically outlines rules for such discourse and Mezirow (2000) adopted them saying that participants in the discussions involving transformative learning must also 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. (pp. 13–14)

Like critical reflection, discourse demands a great deal from participants, including emotional maturity, empathy, self-awareness, an ability not to be adversarial, and an ability to hold different and apparently contradictory thoughts concurrently. It also emphasizes consensus building—not always possible in real life (Mezirow, 2000, p. 11). Whether these are requirements for or an outcome of transformative learning is not always clear! Other concepts are important in further iterations of transformation theory.

Lifeworld

The lifeworld is a pool of intuitive knowledge about the objective, social, and intersubjective world, employed, usually without thinking, in order to establish and sustain interactions. According to Mezirow (1991), it 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" (p. 69). For Habermas (1987), knowledge stored in the lifeworld is deeply sedimented and normally unproblematic in everyday life (p. 126). As if anticipating transformative learning, Habermas asserts that as soon as the lifeworld becomes problematic it loses its role as a background certainty

and becomes subject to discursive examination. Transformation theory indicates that the lifeworld is transformed (Mezirow, 1991, p. 69).

Communicative action or conducting free open democratic discourse involves exactly the conditions necessary for transformative learning. Full free participation in critical and reflective discourse is viewed by Mezirow as a core activity of transformative learning and is indeed a human right (Mezirow et al., 1990, p. 11). It is these connections that suggest transformation theory is already a critical theory.

Intersubjectivity

Mezirow (1994) insists that transformation theory has a social dimension:

> Perspective transformation does necessitate a critique of alienating social forms when one is addressing socio-linguistic codes, which include social norms, language codes, ideologies, philosophies, theories. This process may obviously lead to collective action. However, a critique of social organizations may be of limited utility when one addresses either psychological or epistemic codes. (p. 228)

Discourse and transformative learning require intersubjectivity. Habermas (1992) states that the rational potential in linguistic practice is based on sound intersubjectivity that is a "glimmer of symmetrical relations marked by free, reciprocal recognition" (p. 145). Communicative action, discourse, and critical reflection are firmly grounded in the mutuality of intersubjectivity.

Habermas (2008) states that the "public domain of the jointly inhabited interior of our lifeworld is at once inside and outside" (p. 14) and the "barrier between inner and outer is not just a filtering by an osmotic membrane" (p. 15). The inside/outside dichotomy is misleading. He (2008) continues:

> Even in expressions of its most personal feelings and its most intimate excitations, an ostensibly private consciousness thrives on the impulses it receives from the cultural network of public, symbolically expressed, and intersubjectively shared categories, thoughts and meanings. (p. 15)

It is difficult to imagine a stronger statement of the false dichotomy of individual and social, public, and private that seems to inform the critiques that transformative learning is individualistic. It is difficult to disconnect

an individual's transformative learning from the social dimension. In this, transformative learning is closely allied to critical theory. Transformation theory holds 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. These ideas from Habermas lead us to conclude that transformation theory is grounded in and infused with a sense of the social. Collard and Law (1989) may be correct when they critique Mezirow's inability to fuse the interactionist legacy in his thinking with "ideas from Habermas" (p. 100).

Habermas is a neglected contributor to how we understand learning in society. In addition to writing (1970) on the role of universities in society he adopted as a basic theorem that "subjects capable of speech and action, who can be affected by reasons, can learn – and in the long run even, 'cannot not learn'" (2003, p. 8). He (1975) holds that

> the fundamental mechanism for social evolution in general is to be found in an automatic inability not to learn. Not learning, but not-learning is the phenomenon that calls for explanation at the socio-cultural level of development. Therein lies, if you will, the rationality of man. (p. 15)

We learn by growing into the symbolic structures of our lifeworlds. A society learns by taking on the evolutionary challenges caused by the failure of the available steering capacities (Habermas, 1991) and new problem-solving capacities are always a result of new problematic situations. For Habermas (2003), the task of epistemology is to "explain the learning process, complex, *from the very beginning*, that sets in when the expectations that guide our actions are problematized" (p. 13). The disorienting dilemmas of transformative learning are suggested here.

Habermas relates adult learning to his vision of a democratic society and calls democracy an adult learning project (Habermas, 1987) as he associates democracy with free and unrestrained communication. Habermas (1979) continues: "I can imagine the attempt to arrange a society democratically only as a self-controlled learning process" (p. 186). By implication, transformative learning becomes a democracy project. This echoes Dewey's (1943) understanding of school as "a miniature

community, an embryonic society" (p. 18). Habermas (1987) also postulates an adult learning crisis in modern society, arguing that adults are not sufficiently prepared for what is central to his vision of a democratic society, namely participation in public discourse.

Subsequent iterations of critical theory build on this and identify recognition (rather than distorted communications) as the pathology of capitalism. As we grow and develop the

> deeper the process of individuation shapes the inner life of a person, the deeper she becomes entangled towards the outside,… in an even denser and more fragile network of relationships of reciprocal recognition. (Habermas, 2008, p. 16)

Axel Honneth is our ally realizing this recognition turn hinted at by Habermas.

Honneth's Critical Theory

Axel Honneth (2009) continues the Frankfurt School's social critique by asserting 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 [critical theorists] always aim at exploring the social causes of a pathology of human rationality. (p. vii)

He reorients critical theory by interpreting the distorted communications of Habermas as misrecognitions. He brings to the fore a theory of intersubjectivity and the struggle for recognition (1995) as key ideas for critical theory today. He (1995) argues that

> the reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee. (p. 92)

Central to Honneth's (1995) work is a clear statement of intersubjectivity and this "relationship to oneself … is not a matter of a solitary

ego appraising itself, but an intersubjective process, in which one's attitude towards oneself emerges in one's encounter with the other's attitude towards oneself" (p. xii).

The struggle for recognition, based on the need for self-esteem and the experience of disrespect, explains social development. The experience of disrespect triggers actions motivated by feelings of indignation and injustices (Honneth, 2014a). Internal (psychic) conflicts resulting from inadequate recognition drive social change. In this way, the social and personal are connected. The antidote to being too individualistic lies in Honneth's critical theory of the struggle for recognition. Recognition and mutual acceptance explicitly underpin the communicative action of Habermas as well as critical reflection for transformative learning. Discourse is built on mutual recognition and intersubjectivity (Honneth, 1995). This moves the debate about critical reflection away from the perceived highly cognitive and rational interest of Habermas toward an expanded theory of recognition and intersubjectivity. This has the potential to resolve the problem in transformation theory as to whether learning is an individual or social phenomenon.

From Recognition to Emancipation

Honneth (2014a) also reorients critical theory beyond recognition to focus on freedom. In order to realize social freedom, individuals must be able to view each other's freedom as a condition for their own. Members of society are defined as free by their ability to enhance and initiate mutual recognition. Honneth's vision of democracy involves not only the political sphere but emancipated democratic families and socialized markets. For Honneth (2014a), the realization of freedom in any one 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" (p. 331). Everything is connected. Individual freedom cannot be realized if one is not involved in the "we" of democratic will formation where the same weight is afforded to the contributions of all citizens (Honneth, 2014b). Individual and social freedoms are connected—not in some vague or superficial way but essentially. One cannot be fully free in some individual way alone but only when individual and social emancipation are connected. This has clear implications for the ways in which

critiques have attempted to disconnect individual learning from social learning.

This immediately suggests a softening of the highly rational and demanding concept of critical reflection and a rethinking of transformation theory. Recognition is a precondition for rational discourse. As long as transformative learning is strongly associated with Habermas, it may well remain overly rational in its presentation. It needs to be grounded more firmly in the intersubjectivity of Honneth's critical theory. This does not imply that these ideas are absent in Habermas. They are not. They seem to be more easily identified and accessible in Honneth.

Honneth and Transformative Learning

Transformation theory can now be reframed so that rational discourse is seen as based on an interpersonal process of recognition that builds self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. The idea that learning is either individual or social can be reframed. This implies that transformative learning is best supported by interactions that are respectful but that also explicitly recognize the unique worth of each individual along with the aspirations that prompt their struggles for recognition. Transformative learning escapes the charge of being overly rational.

Struggles for recognition can also be reinterpreted as disorienting dilemmas—the first step toward transformative learning. Dilemmas involve whether to stay in a world circumscribed by experiences of misrecognition or respond to struggles for recognition and acknowledgment through addressing perplexities that prompt learning.

Transformative learning also involves making connections between individual problems and broader social issues. Personal problems are closely and necessarily connected to broader social issues. This is an epistemologically essential step in interpreting the world that cannot be understood properly without connecting personal and social perspectives.

As Honneth allows us to reinterpret the work of Mezirow, we rephrase Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" as "pedagogy of the misrecognized." But a living theory cannot remain static and survive. The critical theory of Oskar Negt allows us to reimagine these ideas again in the search for a critical theory of transformative learning.

Oskar Negt

Negt is a prolific writer on philosophy, sociology, and organization theory and is equally active in journalism and the media (Langston, 2020). He collaborates with Alexander Kluge, an award-winning movie/TV producer (Kluge, 2020). Negt's main interests are work as a source of identity and dignity (in the face of injustices); critical pedagogy for adults and schools (as a source of social theory, emancipatory learning, and action); and politics. Oskar Negt shares the concerns of Habermas and Honneth and says that "Democracy is the only politically conceived social order that has to be learned, over and over, every day, into old age" as a "process of education and learning" (Kluge & Negt, 2014, p. 452).

Negt (2008) is one of the few critical theorists who explicitly addresses adult education and is active in worker education (Langston, 2020). His focus is on the experiences of workers as the starting point for learning and teaching. The experience of workers (Kluge & Negt, 2014) is a source of social recognition and identity but is infused with the contradictions of capitalist society. This experience is a source of "resistance to capitalism" (p. 31). His concept of exemplary learning uses these experiences of workers along with a sociological imagination to understand these issues and foster social action to alter the condition of workers (and learners). Stollman (in Kluge & Negt, 2014) writes that "the rallying cry for Negt and Kluge's work is no longer 'Workers of the world, unite!' but rather 'Experiences of the world, unite!'" (p. 464).

He suggests how the experiences of learners might be utilized in teaching (Kluge & Negt, 2014; Negt & Kluge, 1993) and makes use of a range of materials and pedagogical techniques to enhance the critical intelligence of students (Negt & Kluge, 1993, p. 106). He is acutely aware that political and social change is difficult and involves what Kluge refers to in his recent book title (quoting Weber) as a slow and powerful "drilling through hard boards" (Kluge, 2017).

Negt and Transformative Learning

Negt's work on experience is important for constructing a critical theory of transformative learning that starts with a disorienting dilemma. This is an experience of disorientation, of fear maybe, or anxiety and of identifying one's problem with broader social issues. Negt (Illeris, 2002)

expands Dewey's understanding of experience on which Mezirow relied so heavily.

Dewey (1966) defines education as "that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience" (p. 76) and included "organizing, restructuring and transforming" experience (p. 50). For Dewey, experience has two dimensions. First, experience is in continuity with previous experience. In pursuing meaning we modify or integrate new experience with previous experiences. For Mezirow (1978), "a meaning perspective refers to the structure of cultural assumptions within which one's new experience is assimilated to—and transformed by—one's past experience" (p. 101). Second, experience is in interaction with one's broader environment. Experience is created by interacting with the environment (Dewey, 1963, p. 43). Learning involves becoming aware of these interactions and continuities (Dewey, 1966, pp. 76–77) and how they too are themselves distorted processes open to misinterpretation. Frames of reference help interpret experience and dysfunctional frames of reference distort our experience. In fact, misrecognitions distort meaning schemes.

Dewey (1933) was clearly against the dualisms of Western philosophy and its Cartesian habit of thinking in terms of "either/or"—for example with respect to mind/body or fact/value. The problem for Dewey, having rejected dualism as a habit of thought, was how to connect the interactions and continuities that formed habits of cognition. He typically connected these conflicting polarities of Cartesian thought with an "and." He emphasized this in a number of book titles (*Democracy and Education*, etc.). But there is a further and more critical iteration of these connections beyond the anti-dualism of Dewey and the pragmatists (e.g., Pierce and James). It is worth noting how strongly Mezirow relied on Dewey's (1933, p. 16) concept of habit of mind or of expectation.

Mezirow probably allowed the dialectical understanding of experience escape his grasp. Dewey accepted dialectical understandings in a number of areas of his philosophy (ethics, art, and methodology) and his reliance on Hegel, though clear, is complicated by how these ideas evolved over time especially in dialogue with other Hegelians. Dewey's (1966, p. 272) understanding of education for growth was enhanced by his accepting that the process was dialectical. Learning and experience are dialectical.

This may have been a missed opportunity for Mezirow (and transformative learning theory) to grasp the full contextualized understanding as outlined by Hegel.

Negt reframes experience and says that the continuities and interactions are dialectical. This has implications for transformative learning. Mezirow (1978, p. 101) hardly hints that this interaction between one's current experience and one's previous experience is dialectical. The internal process of the individual and the environment is also dialectical. This fundamentally alters our understanding of transformative learning theory. The familiar phases of transformative learning must now be reinterpreted. The accommodations and assimilations referred to by Hoggan et al., (2017, p. 51) miss the dialectical aspects of experience. This dialectical turn avoids the "stuckness" of false dichotomies involving the social and personal and is a different version of "stuckness" in transformation theory to that mentioned by Hoggan et al., (2017, pp. 50–54).

Transformative learning also involves connecting one's individual experience with broader social issues and this connection is also dialectical. Critiques of transformation theory focus on the way the social dimension of learning is misconstrued. We can now define this problem differently. Individual problems are connected dialectically with broader social issues. The political is personal—dialectically. This makes understanding one's problems or dilemmas and the search for solutions more complex than previously understood and are not properly understood unless they are seen as dialectical. Connecting with broader social issues is not just an interesting add-on, but an essential dimension of understanding one's experiences. Indeed, without this dialectical dimension, the connections are misconstrued. I now propose that the actions one takes, as a result of the final phase of the transformative learning process, should be a dialectically interconnected set of personal and social actions. Praxis is always dialectical.

This reconstruction is a consequence of Mezirow's approach to thinkers whose ideas were useful for his project. He was aware that Dewey's understanding of critical reflection was problematic for understanding an adult version of critical reflection and he ignored Dewey's reliance on Hegel. Negt's work is particularly helpful for illuminating aspects of Mezirow's work that have been uncritically conceptualized. Mezirow borrowed selectively.

These are not entirely new ideas in European education studies. Salling Olesen is credited by Knud Illeris (2002) with borrowing these ideas from

Negt in 1989. Negt, more than any other critical theorist associated with the Frankfurt School, builds an education theory around these ideas. Even if learners are not aware of these connections, real understandings are only fully revealed when they are interpreted as dialectic. Quoting Hegel, Negt and Kluge (1993) write that:

> The dialectical movement, which consciousness performs on itself, both on its knowledge as well as on its object, in so far as the new, true object emerges from consciousness from this movement is in fact what is known as experience. (p. 5)

Negt's contribution to adult education includes concepts such as exemplary learning and societal competencies that he worked out in the context of emancipatory trade union and worker education. The links with the concept of sociological imagination of C Wright Mills are clear. Negt (1971) emphasizes the promise of Mills interdisciplinary method that illuminates "structural relationships between individual life histories, immediate interests, wishes, hopes and historical events" (p. 28).

Negt (1971) goes beyond the teaching of skills and competences and emphasizes the important pedagogical idea of understanding "workers existence as a social problem" (p. 4). He involves workers in analyzing and interpreting their social situation in order to understand the causes of their current situation and inform actions to change it. Negt focusses on developing an emancipatory theory of worker education and a corresponding teaching manual. His social theory is grounded in the experiences of workers. This involves an exercise in sociological imagination so that both lived experiences of learners and the possibilities that may emerge are reimagined. He calls this exemplary learning, learning that is connected to the interests of learners; that connects the experiences of learners with broader social issues and is relevant for their emancipation (Negt, 1971, p. 97). This is a rare excursion into adult learning theory by a Frankfurt School scholar (1971).

Learning is more than accumulating knowledge. It is a collective journey of self-determination leading to political and emancipatory actions. Unlike transformative learning, Negt supports a curriculum or list of competences that are essential for exemplary learning. The topics taught, or competences as Negt (2010) calls them, are these six: identity competence; historical competence; social justice (or awareness) competence; technological competence; ecological competence; and economic

competence (pp. 218–234). This curriculum links the learners' individual experiences with broader social issues; investigates and explores the interconnections in order to see how individual experiences and structural issues are connected dialectically. Along with dialectical thinking, this meta-learning is fundamental to exemplary learning (Negt, 1993, p. 661).

This leads to a systematic theory and practice of worker education (adult education) and closely approximates to transformative learning. It involves thinking independently, dialectically, systemically, with sociological imagination, utilizing critical reflection and democratic participation. This extends transformation theory into social and political arenas in ways not found in transformative learning's traditionally tame and politically neutral stance.

Negt takes adult education beyond the concepts of personal growth and development that may in practice lead to fitting into the social structures of the current world. He outlines how experience itself is modified by social structures (Illeris, 2002, p. 151). Negt and Kluge (1993) say that "experience is the most important thing that workers actually produce" (p. xlviii). Illeris (2002) states this well: "The working class can break through the distortion of immediate experiences, experience the structural conditions for their experiential development, and then fight to change these conditions" (p. 152). The experience of workers is the best route to understanding the social system as it is. Illeris insightfully (but only in passing) connects these ideas with Mezirow's theory.

Olesen (1989) and Wildemeersch (1992) have been aware for these ideas for some time. Olesen (1989), quoting Negt, sees "experience as a collective process because when we experience as individuals we also do so through a socially structured consciousness" (p. 8) and again "the socialized individual cannot experience individually" (p. 68). The individual is always multiple, or as Brecht writes: "the self is always plural" or individual (cited in Kluge & Negt, 2014, p. 45). These connections extend the links between the central role of experience in transformative learning and critical theory—a theory with a dialectic core.

Using literature, especially science fiction, satire, fragments of literature, film, and documentaries, Negt encourages the dangerous thoughts of critical intelligence. In a book title Kluge calls this pedagogy "learning processes with a deadly outcome" (Kluge, 1996).

Conclusion

As the ongoing project of contributing to a critical theory of transformative learning commenced by Mezirow (1981), we identify a number of strands of critical theory that contribute to this project. Some of these Mezirow creatively utilized, and others he ignored. In both instances, the full potential of the ideas was not identified so that critiques could be addressed. Transformation theory and critical theory continue to evolve and the task continues of researching the possibility of further connections, whether through Habermas, Honneth, Negt, or indeed others so that a fuller iteration of a living theory of transformative learning might unfold to meet the increasingly challenging learning needs of individuals, communities, and society.

All the authors discussed here have pedagogical orientations. Mezirow has a pedagogy of transformation; Habermas a pedagogy of rationality; Honneth a pedagogy of recognition and emancipation; and Negt a pedagogy of dialectical experience. The case could be made to switch these around and associate these concepts with the different authors. For instance, transformation theory might become a pedagogy of democracy, rationality, and intersubjectivity; a pedagogy of recognition and emancipation; and a pedagogy of dialectical experience. It might even, if is to remain a critical theory of adult learning, become a pedagogy of dialectical and dangerous thinking.

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