Transforming Experience: Experiencing Transformation[[1]](#footnote-1)

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We live in a time of heightened emotions. Covid has turned our world upside down and we have become aware of how many in our society whose work was not usually valued is highly valued now; those whose work was highly valued could be done without – at least for now. To survive we learned social distancing. To survive we need social closeness. Science may have got us into this mess, now it may be one of the important routes out. There are those who have died and those who had to die; those who worked and those who had to work, to take risks; those who continued teaching and taking care of learners. Then Ukraine. Trauma and pain and loss stalk the landscape of Europe. Unimaginable cruelty

Yet, young lovers still hold hands in the park, babies are born, hope seems to survive and emerge. Climate change is also a crisis already. And the transformative learning community meets to assess its position in the world, take stock, meet old friends, make new ones and re-set our compass for the next crisis.

Indeed it could be argued that these are not the crises we face at all. The crisis is really the breakdown in social cohesion, in our ability to understand and share understandings about Covid, about anything. How knowledge has become a weapon used to beat others, with especially those with whom we disagree. The inability of the political system and the educational system to hold people together within a nation and broadly agree on how power might be exercised. Threats to democracy are not only exercised by the Putins of the world but by those who on the way up the authoritarian ladder can kill the imagination, the curiosities, the ability to critique and the dreams of large numbers of people. On the way, the uncritical and the critical demonize each other and miss sight of the threat that threatens all. If you like how the system has addressed covid, you are likely to love how we will deal with climate change. Our common humanity is not the enemy. How can TL help? Does it have the legs for the journey?

Yet, we live in exciting times when adult education and lifelong learning and all their iterations are a vehicle of hope for us as we try to make a difference.

The conference organizers asked that we talk about the state of transformative learning:

Perspective transformation was born in Teachers College. The father Jack Mezirow did good enough babysitting and made sure it survived the difficult first years. Jack hope for a more popular name and he brainstormed with colleagues and students. He got his wish and indeed more than he wished for. It got a new name in 1980 called Transformative Learning. As its importance and popularity grew it swelled the numbers who wanted to be engaged in transformative learning. They were students, scholars, researchers, teachers and even interlopers. It spread globally, validated by adult learners, and it some ways got so diluted that one wonders if ‘transformation’ lost some of its meaning.

It spread across the Atlantic, to Asia and Australia was an early and critical friend. Africa responded with Ubuntu and Ujama. Recent collections of chapters including the excellent *Palgrave Handbook*, our *European Perspectives* (Palgrave) and a number of interesting books from Greece are only examples of the gathering and growing of TL. Interest groups in Italy, ESREA and dedicated journals along with the openness of other adult education journals have all contributed to the expansion. As have conferences. TL competes for priority in the field of adult education with probably more powerful policy mantras and ideas such as lifelong learning. International cooperations make TL an exciting endeavor today. John Holford writing in the current editorial in the *International Journal of Lifelong Education* (Holford, et al., 2022) call TL ‘one of the most influential approaches to adult learning throughout the lifetime of this journal’. However the space given to TL in the recent US Handbook (*Handbook of Adult and Continuing Education 2020*) shows how TL struggles to compete with other priorities in our field.

I also notice from teaching and other activities that TL has become one of the most widely accepted (along with Freire) sets of ideas informing teaching and learning and research. Student and scholars in a very wide range of disciplines look to TL as a framework for understanding their activities – health education, prison work, business, lawyers, music education, organizational studies, etc. Then add those who look for ways of engaging in the kind of learning John Dirkx calls integrating the outer world and the ‘inner community of the self’. New insights from neuroscience may provide fruitful ways forward. This is an intersectional process of development and acknowledgement of TL.

Higher education and universities have remained mostly immune to the impact of TL, but who would have thought of universities as particularly open to transformation anyway?

There are perfectly good maps of the field conducted say by Washburn (2021). Within our own TL community there is a sense that as TL enjoys its middle age it has probably grown a little roundy or flabby. It has stalled in some ways and needs some kind of stimulus to encourage further growth. Pruning maybe or some rapid feed! So much of what is researched and written has to do with testing whether learners have experienced TL, so much is focused on the 10 (or 12?) phases of TL, so much work is focused on searching for ways of measuring or assessing TL. This paper is an attempt to support giving TL a new coat of paint or a facelift or even a transformation itself. What will the next iteration of the theory look like? As the suite of papers unfold in this conference we may get an update on some future directions and we might keep an eye on where the theory is moving into the next decade and especially in the time before the next TL conference.

On a personal note, I want to introduce my co-presenter Saskia. We are Covid colleagues – working together since Covid began. We met at two TL Conferences - once as parallel presenters in XII Tacoma (2016) and briefly again in TL XIII at Teachers College (2018). I remember walking down Broadway in 2014 with Fergal Finnegan after the final event of the 11th Conference in October and stating that 2014 would probably be my final conference paper as it might just be time to acknowledge that I was 4 years retired and this may be a good time to relax and sail my boat. I was also thinking of 1978 when Jack Mezirow asked me to help him update his knowledge of critical theory. Little did I know that this journey would be still on-going. In this I recognize the ability of the TL community to sustain colleagues over a long time in its community of praxis. In case I am saying this too indirectly, the point I am making is that theory is always (auto)biographical. As Maxine Greene eloquently stated: ‘I am what I will become’.

Enough of this, let’s do some work.

There are two major kinds of critical comments made about TL as a theory of learning.

1. It is too focused on individual learning to the neglect of social learning and/or social change. Reading the literature, this seems to be the case and since Mezirow simply left the problem like that saying that individual transformative learning might indeed lead to social change. There is a perception that TL is missing a social dimension.
2. Critical reflection, though not the central focus of all the iterations of TL (including my own empirical verifications), is a central influence – especially as TL relies so heavily on Habermas. Critical reflection is an Olympic sport in adult education, it requires training, much of it altitude training. Whether it is Leonard Cohen’ high altitude monastic retreat or Habermas’s ivory tower…it requires an early start each day! I could so easily be led down the tracks of Leonard Cohen’s ‘First we take Manhatten! Then we take Berlin!’, ‘there’s a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in’ or ‘Everybody knows the dice are loaded’….Everybody knows.
3. Other say Critical theory is too complex; it takes too much time.

There are two reactions to these critiques:

1. Too many repeat the critiques, without a critical encounter with their veracity;
2. I would like to address or fix the critiques from within the theory, asking: Are there solutions to these critiques from within the critical theory tradition in particular. This paper says yes.

Mezirow borrowed concepts from Jürgen Habermas in order to build a theoretical base (Mezirow, 1981). With recent iterations of critical theory by Axel Honneth and Oskar Negt I want to explore the potential of their ideas for developing a critical theory of transformative learning—one that would avoid becoming rather conventional, fixed and politically neutral. The difference between critical theory approaches to TL and many other approaches in our field is the following. The intention of most TL, unlike radical scholars,

is not to overturn current political or economic structures, but rather to provide critical, insightful analyses of how adults learn, and how educators might create possibilities for learning that may ultimately benefit society. (Gouthro,2022, p. 112)

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 was Mezirow’s (1981) original mistake (other followed) in trying to initiate a critical theory of adult learning - he was not critiquing his own assumptions. In addition, Mezirow did 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 the critiques.

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.

**What is Frankfurt School Critical Theory?**

The 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 all agree that philosophy aims at the “practical transformation of the existing social conditions” (Habermas, 1981, p. 469). In previous papers at this conference I have looked in the work of Jürgen Habermas (Fleming, 2000, 2002) and Axel Honneth (Fleming, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021a, 2021b) as the most widely known members of the Frankfurt School. Mezirow in his work relied heavily on Habermas for concepts that helped understand the kinds of critical discussion one might have as part of the transformative learning process.

# Mezirow and Habermas

Transformation theory, in the Mezirow version 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 (Mezirow, 1981). 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!

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)

**What is missing in Transformation Theory?**

Discourse and transformative learning require intersubjectivity. In revisiting Habermas (1992) he 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 by Habermas 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. The dichotomy of individual and society is transcended by an epistemology of intersubjectivity and the dichotomy between individual and social development is a spurious one for educators. 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)

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. 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.

~~Habermas (1974) in a prescient moment (1974) asserts that:~~

~~as natural scientific medicine brings a few diseases under control, there arises a consciousness of contingency in relation to all illness….Suffering from the contingencies of an uncontrolled process gains a new quality to the extent that we believe ourselves capable of rationally intervening in it. The suffering is then the negative of a new need… (p. 164)~~

# Honneth’s Critical Theory

Axel Honneth (2009) reorients critical theory by interpreting the distorted communications of Habermas as misrecognitions. He brings to the fore the struggle for recognition (1995) as key ideas for critical theory today.

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, explainssocial development. The experience of disrespect triggers actions motivated by feelings of indignation and injustices (Honneth, 2014a). 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 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 re-thinking of emancipatory 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. 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 re-interpreted 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 acknowledgement 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 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 re-imagined these ideas again in the search for a critical theory of transformative learning.

# Oskar Negt

I want to move on to look at the work of Oskar Negt - studied with Horkheimer and Adorno, was assistant to Habermas in 1962, and is a prominent scholar at Leibnitz University Hannover which is an “extension of the Frankfurt School” (Illeris, 2002, 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. These Frankfurt School scholars help progress Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning.

Negt is a prolific writer on philosophy, sociology, 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). 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 the 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.

Mezirow probably allowed the dialectical understanding of experience escape his grasp.[[3]](#footnote-3) 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. Peter Alheit (2020) provides an example of this connection. Quoting Erving Goffman’s 1977 study he illustrates how gendered social rules influence individual actions and are thus reproduced across generations. According to Goffman male-female intimate relations are normally of an older/taller man and younger/smaller woman. These are the personal choices of many. These are social and cultural constructs, difficult to change and that act behind the backs of the people concerned. Here ‘the “social” breaks into the self-referential self-description of the psychic system, as it were, without being conceptually integrated’ (Alheit 2020, p.85). The tacit knowledge of how to act as gendered people operates powerfully because it does so precognitively as ‘experience knowledge from countless interaction situations and becomes effective to a certain extent in the background’ of our actions. It is experienced as beyond question and even natural (Alheit, 2020, p. 86). This tacit knowledge is only available where disruptions occur and where some event forces the participants to reflect. Crises provide such disruptions.

This understanding that the lifeworld needs to be transformed is a shorthand way of indicating that questions about whether change is individual or social may miss the point. The answer is yes – both need to be transformed and change in one leads to change in the other.

So 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.[[4]](#footnote-4)

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 mis-construed. The action one takes as the essential final phase of transformative learning I now propose as a dialectically interconnected set of actions at personal and social levels. Praxis is always dialectical.

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.

Negt (1971) emphasizes the promise of C Wright Mills interdisciplinary method that illuminates “structural relationships between individual life histories, immediate interests, wishes, hopes and historical events” (p. 28). This points to a critical theory approach to narrative research also, one that goes beyond the making of connections and makes these connections dialectical.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This is a rare excursion into adult learning theory by a Frankfurt School scholar.

Learning is more than accumulating knowledge. It is a collective journey of self-determination leading to political and emancipatory actions. 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 provocatively 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), 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 dividual (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.

Obstinacy[[6]](#footnote-6)

# 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, 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 critical 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 and discourse; 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 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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1. Fleming, T. (2022). Transforming experience: Experiencing transformation. Keynote at International Transformative Learning Conference 2022. Accessed at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/11quUz4NIQ0EKZ22Nb9Zd6-No72BAMXhZ/edit> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is based on a published chapter: Fleming T. (2022). Transformative learning and critical theory: Making connections with Habermas, Honneth, and Negt. In A. Nicolaides, S. Eschenbacher, P.T. Buergelt, Y. Gilpin-Jackson, M. Welch, & M. Misawa, (Eds.), The Palgrave Handbook of Learning for Transformation (pp. 25-43). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.  
   <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84694-7_2> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 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. 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). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In their work on History and Obstinacy (2014) Kluge & Negt identify a powerful concept of Obstinacy that lies behind people’s resistance as it reaches into unconscious thought, genetic memory and even cellular life. It is useful to link it with the Honneth’s struggle for recognition and together they allow us understand the unquenchable desire for emancipation (and possibly for transformation). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)