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Transformative Learning in Theory and Practice

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Abstract

This is a response to "The Ethical Knower: Rethinking Our Pedagogy in the Age of Trump" by Elana Michelson. We appreciate Michelson's critical evaluation of the appropriateness of transformative learning and the use of personal narrative, as well as the frames and tools she offers to help us deal with current challenges such as "epistemological chaos" in the "age of Trump." Michelson's distinction between epistemological and hermeneutic analysis, as well as her conception of meaning perspectives as social/cultural foundations of identity, are helpful insights. The educational practices she finds disturbing are indeed ineffective approaches to teaching, and we are inspired by her invitation directed to "us as a community to struggle toward a more honest assessment of how our field might better respond to the phenomena that led to the age of Trump." In this response, we talk further about some points made in Michelson's article, elaborating on several issues and offering alternative perspectives that we believe may be productive paths forward. We do this in three parts, by (a) engaging in a critique of some of Michelson's statements and positions, (b) elaborating on the conceptions of transformative learning in practice, and (c) expanding on the discussion of epistemological and hermeneutic analysis.

Keywords

Transformative Learning, Dialogue, Hermeneutics, Critical Reflection, Indoctrination

Part 1: Introduction and Critique

Michelson's (2019) article, "The Ethical Knower: Rethinking Our Pedagogy in the Age of Trump," describes how the election of Trump cast into doubt for her the effectiveness of two of the most widespread pedagogies of adult education: transformative

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learning and personal narratives. In elaborating on her reflections, Michelson refers to conversations she has had with her neighbors Mike and Vinnie, who are skilled tradespeople and political conservatives. A primary assertion of Michelson's article is that the aspirational ideal of transformative learning to bring people from different ideologies into critical dialogue and mutual critical self-reflection is too idealistic and not attainable in educational practice (or presumably in neighborhood conversations). In its place, Michelson recommends that educators acknowledge and focus attention on the ways that people like Mike and Vinnie demonstrate epistemological integrity (by which she means their commitment to the accuracy of their knowledge) in their work and suggests that educational efforts focus on encouraging them to use the same epistemological integrity in other domains, such as in their political views.

Because we applaud much of what Michelson says in her article, we want to dedicate most of our space in this response to elaborating fruitful ways forward. Therefore, we will begin with a just few points of clarification and critique so that we can then turn to building on our common perspectives.

Critiques of Michelson's Presentation of Transformative Learning[1]

Michelson critiques the "practice of transformative learning," whereby we infer that she means the theory of transformative learning (TL) and its suggested pedagogies. We feel that the practices and norms Michelson describes are evidence of inappropriate implementation of TL theory rather than inevitable products of the theory itself.[2] This distinction between theory and common usage of the theory in practice is a crucial one in order to highlight where the shortcomings actually occur: poor theory needs to be addressed by changes to or abandonment of the theory, whereas inappropriate application of theory in practice is remedied by critiquing and improving the practice.

For example, Michelson (2019) criticizes TL theory for failing "to account fully for how deeply embedded people's way of being in the world actually is" (p. 145). This statement is, in our view, not true. Although it would be impossible for a theory to "account fully" for any issue of such complexity, the TL writings acknowledge explicitly that the meaning perspectives that are most influential in our lives are extremely deeply embedded. Of course, a specific educational practice may not incorporate this acknowledgment in a sufficient way. We would argue that the theory is often misapplied in practice because, as Michelson points out, educators focus on the worldview they want to espouse and/or the ways students need to change, rather than focusing on "establishing a sense of solidarity" with others who perceive the world differently and then working together to each try to understand the world better, as the theory advocates (Mezirow, 1996, p. 170). Additionally, deep critical dialogue and self-reflection require many preconditions and appropriate circumstances (such as time, open atmosphere, trust, balance of power, etc.), professional skills of educators, and self-reflective skills of participants, which are not necessarily present in everyday educational practice. Therefore, and here we agree with Michelson, pedagogical practices that jump unprepared into deep forms of critical dialogue and critical self-reflection—without first building solidarity, without the intent to mutually work together to

examine and improve each own view, and without prerequisite conditions—are inappropriate and unhelpful.

This missing distinction between theory and inappropriate practice is perhaps most clear in the quip: "All we need is a bit of critical self-reflection, and Vinnie will be channeling Emma Lazarus while Mike joins the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People" (Michelson, 2019, p. 146). This very well might be an accurate depiction of the misreading of theory that leads to inappropriate practice, but it would be an extremely simplified and inaccurate portrayal of TL processes as described in the literature. Mezirow may not have used Flax's notion of "political genealogies of subjectivity" (Flax, 1993, as cited in Michelson, 2019, p. 146), where *meaning perspectives* might be conceptualized as "foundational structures of identity, culture, and community" (Michelson, 2019, p. 146), but it is nevertheless ubiquitous in the literature that one's deepest and most foundational meaning perspectives are developed in early childhood from our most important authority figures, and therefore "challenging one's cherished beliefs . . . often invokes a threatening emotional experience" (Mezirow, 2012, pp. 87–88). Without a compelling reason, there simply is not enough conative energy to justify engagement in such a threatening learning endeavor.

> Making a critical appraisal of the assumptions underlying our roles, priorities and beliefs is usually tension producing and can be acutely threatening. We defend our social roles with the armor of our strongest emotions, for it is often through these roles that we have acquired our very concept of ourselves and achieved our greatest satisfactions. Usually a dilemma must generate pressure and anxiety to effect a change in perspective. (Mezirow, 1978, p. 105)

Similarly, Illeris (2007) describes this type of learning as "something one only becomes engaged in when faced by a situation or challenge exceeding what one can manage on one's existing personal basis, but which one *unavoidably must* win over in order to get further" (p. 45, italics added), and Kegan (2000) offers the imagery of a "painful voyage," a "mutiny," and a "human wrenching of the self from its cultural surround" (p. 67). Although every theory has its lacunae, surely TL theory cannot be accused of ignoring the difficulty of the process and the need for a compelling impetus to initiate and sustain it. If Michelson's point is that the way scholars and/or practitioners talk about TL implies that it is easily and lightly done, then she is correct in pointing to this as a problem of superficial application of theory. Nevertheless, we should not inaccurately portray TL theory as making such a claim.

Similarly, Michelson's (2019) article implies that the practice of TL is often intended to initiate and promote predetermined changes/transformation, because it "frames the sociocultural and historical nature of the self largely as a constraint from which one must be liberated" (p. 146), while all pedagogical efforts are focused on "how students must change" (p. 146). Conversely, we want to point out that TL theory addresses the question of transformation only of those socioculturally or historically influenced meaning perspectives which are perceived by the learner as being

dysfunctional. We do not disagree with Michelson that this focus on how students should change exists, but we do disagree that such a focus on prompting a specific change is inherent in the written theory by Mezirow or other TL theorists.

A possible and justifiable reason for Michelson's description of TL is that it has become such a ubiquitous term in the adult education scholarship and is used to refer to so many varieties of learning phenomena, that its terms and suggested pedagogies can seem to be tired, devoid of nuance, and as a metaphorical cure-all for all educational endeavors; we consider this to be a result of superficial reading of theory rather than of the theory itself. What our discipline needs are more clear delimitations around what TL is (and what it is not) and how it can be appropriately implemented in educational situations. Michelson's article speaks to this problem, and she very helpfully offers new terminology to calibrate pedagogies that may be better suited for some situations (e.g., where prerequisite conditions and skills [see below] are not present). Nevertheless, we do not think it wise to diminish the value of TL as an approach for promoting deeper understanding by engaging with others in a dialogue across difference.

Last, although no theory can possibly have the breadth necessary to explain all learning phenomena, the claim that TL theory is not appropriate for the challenges of societal polarization, formation of identity, and the difficulties of engaging in deep dialogue is, in our view, a possible misreading of the theory. Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation, and especially his later incorporation of Habermas' ideas, speak precisely to this point. Habermas' theory of communicative action explores how social and political changes can be possible through special action, that is, an engaging communication under the conditions of his "ideal speech situation" (as an ideal to strive for, where participants are free from coercion and distorted self-perception, are open to alternative points of view, and are able to assess arguments, etc.). This concept develops the idea that it is through a (constant, deep, rational, and self-critical) dialogue with each other that we can approximate the "truth" more closely. Michelson's article speaks to some of these preconditions, especially the ability to assess arguments, as well as to the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of creating such an ideal speech situation in most educational settings.[3] By so doing, Michelson makes an important point that most educational programs are not well-equipped for idealized discourse and critical self-reflection.

Although our discipline is not obligated to treat critical theories by Habermas or others of the Frankfurt School—or TL theory—as if they are sacred, we should be careful not to dismiss them on the grounds of being too idealized. We would not want our discipline's message to the world to be that critical dialogue across difference is too difficult and should be replaced with mere fact checking. "Epistemological self-awareness" is only one skill among many and, although possibly easier to learn than other TL processes, is not sufficient if our society is ever to learn how to communicate effectively across difference.

Mezirow, referring to Habermas, emphasizes the particular role of adult education (and TL) to promote effective living in a pluralistic democratic society through fostering engagement in critical rational discourse without instrumental purposes (but rather with the purpose of coming closer to the "truth" through dialogue)[4]:

> Transformation theory advances the argument that the nature of adult learning itself mandates participatory democracy as both the means and social goal. Following Habermas, this view identifies critical reflection, rational discourse, and praxis as central to significant adult learning and the sine qua non of emancipatory participation. (Mezirow, 1995, p. 66)

Transformative education, as portrayed by Mezirow, is therefore a means for the development of the competencies required to engage in communicative action and thereby participate more effectively while living in a pluralistic, deliberative, participatory democracy. And, the philosophical/political/economic differences represented in Michelson's examples (i.e., her conversations with Mike and Vinnie) are exactly why these difficult competencies are so important.

We still share Michelson's concerns that the practical implementation of TL is challenging and often reduced by practical constraints and professional skills of educators themselves. Indeed, some of the empirical research using TL theory treat the phenomenon as if educators should or even are able to prompt such a life-changing metamorphosis in a classroom environment. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the theoretical work does not treat it so lightly. So, we ask for clarity in the distinction between inferences about naïve theory (which TL, we believe, is not) and sloppy applications of theory, which we understand to be the focus of Michelson's critique.

Part 2: Elaboration on Conceptions of Transformative Learning in Practice

We turn now from a critique to what we hope is a continuation of the conversation that Michelson initiates. Michelson's concern, that to promote *transformation* in our students has become an unspoken standard, gives voice to (what we believe is) a common concern in our discipline. In most educational contexts, it would be difficult to justify the right to cause such powerful disruptions in students' lives. Michelson argues that rather than trying to engage in critical self-reflection (and presumably other practices that the literature claims lead to TL), educators should focus on helping students develop more rudimentary skills of epistemological self-awareness. Michelson's (2019) description of requiring "students to account for the ways in which they adjudicate truth claims" (p. 153) shares an overlap with Mezirow's description of critical self-reflection, which includes this element but goes further. We agree with Michelson's argument in part. It seems reasonably within the purview of most educational contexts to promote the skills and habits of epistemological self-awareness, whereas it is beyond the purview of most contexts to try to cause a life-changing transformation in students (especially if there is a specific worldview toward which the educator is aiming).

That said, it seems intuitive to us that developing the skills and especially the habit of epistemological self-awareness is still potentially, dare we say, *transformative*. We, as educators, can teach and foster skills and habits that we feel are important and beneficial for our students. And, whether we are seeking it or not, many of these skills and habits have the potential over time to change people and their ways of thinking and

being in the world in dramatic ways.[5] Yet acknowledging this potentiality is different than purposefully trying to "transform students." From this, we see at least three different ways that educators can think about the transformative potential of their practice. Understanding the distinctions between these ways of thinking will lead, we believe, to a more nuanced understanding of the theories and practices of adult education.

Prescriptive Approach: Seeking to Transform Others

The seemingly most obvious way of thinking about transformative learning in practice is for the educator to purposefully try to foster an epochal transformation. This way of thinking underlies the practices that Michelson critiques. Implicit in this approach to transformative education is the premise that the educator knows the correct worldview and the constraints from which a learner must be liberated. Mezirow (1978) explicitly warns adult educators of the dangers of being preoccupied with fostering or promoting behavior changes by participants; he even labels this attitude with the term "indoctrination" (p. 107). Seeking to transform someone else into adopting one's own worldview is no less problematic. Even when educators believe their worldview is justified and laudable, it hints at indoctrination rather than emancipatory education, and anyone on the receiving end of it is justified in feeling disrespected.

There is a clear and important difference between (a) educators trying to "transform" students into holding predetermined worldviews (i.e., instrumental action) and (b) educators engaging with students to mutually examine their own worldviews (i.e., communicative action). The former is so highly problematic that we struggle to name situations when it would be appropriate. Michelson (2019) rightly calls out this tendency as a "single-minded focus on how students must change," which leads to a "deficit model of moral education that students . . . understandably might resent" (p. 146). The theory of perspective transformation does not advocate intrusive "liberation" from the outside. Critical reflection is a dialogic process that starts with investigating the dysfunctionality of *one's own* premises.

Some scholars talk about end-states of transformation in terms of the quality, rather than the exact contents, of their perspectives. Most famously, Mezirow advocated for the development of more open, permeable, inclusive, integrative, and discerning perspectives. This is more palatable because it acknowledges that the educator is not the sole possessor nor the arbiter of truth. "As there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge, and because circumstances change, the human condition may be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 3), and negotiating contested meanings is a critical part of participating in a pluralistic (especially democratic) society. We need to insist in both our theory and practice of TL on the distinction between the intended outcomes of more expansive perspectives versus the imposition of a specific worldview. Michelson (2019) alludes to this when she talks of research participants who felt their values and perspectives were held in disdain by liberals.

For educators to try to change students in dramatic ways toward a specific worldview is not a "negotiation" of meanings, and it is inappropriate. On an ethical level, using one's position of power to coerce students into critiquing their own deeply held

views and values is problematic. Furthermore, on a pragmatic level, we consider it a common maxim that people only become open to evaluating their views when they feel that their current ways of making meaning are validated and respected (see, e.g., Kegan, 1982). Michelson (2019) points to this when she describes Hochschild's "reframing in sympathetic terms" (p. 147) the views of politically conservative people. And, engaging in critical discourse and asking for critical self-reflection when not accompanied by building solidarity and sincerely seeking to understand the other's views (through, e.g., perspective taking) lacks this validation and respect.

In all, this approach is what Michelson objects to, and we agree with her.

Process-oriented Approach: Fostering Transformative Processes

There is, however, another way of thinking about transformative education. Often in the literature, scholars talk in terms of processes promoted rather than specific transformed worldviews. Mezirow (1996), for instance, never wrote about particular views to which the process of TL would inevitably lead. Rather, his focus was on fostering the skills and habits whereby learners assess arguments, negotiate their own purposes, values, and meanings, become more aware and critically reflective of assumptions, and become more able to fully and freely participate in discourse. When educators teach and promote practices like these that are espoused in the TL literature, it is common to say they are fostering transformative learning, even if they did not intend for a specific *transformation* to occur during their program or necessarily at any time. This is how we interpret Michelson's pedagogical process of epistemological self-awareness. It is intended to help learners think *better* by helping them develop the skills and habits of sound epistemological practice. If such a process is learned and corresponding habits developed, those learners may eventually experience changes in the trajectory of their thinking and their lived experiences and interactions with others. Is that not the whole point of Michelson's suggestion? If so, then we can see that although the term "transformation" is a bit overstated and a lot overused, it nevertheless speaks to this extra dimension of adult learning that goes beyond immediate learning objectives of a particular educational program and has long-term, life-changing effects.

Adaptive Approach: Recognizing That Students May Likely Experience Transformation

A third way of thinking about transformative learning in practice has nothing to do with trying to foster change but rather in recognizing that the particularities of a given situation give reason to believe that learners may be in the midst of major life changes. And, an understanding of TL (especially of the broader range of TL scholarship that has evolved over the past few decades) can aid educators in supporting learners through such a challenging process. Examples of this from our own work include studying the psychosocial transition of breast cancer survivors (Hoggan, 2014) and the process of learning how to live and participate in a democracy after decades of living

under a totalitarian regime (Kloubert, 2020). Also, recognizing that when students from historically underserved backgrounds (e.g., poverty, immigration) attend community college in the United States, the experience is often highly disorienting and requires forms of learning and adaptation that can usefully be understood through TL theory (Hoggan, 2019b). In this case, drawing on TL theory for understanding can help educators design adaptive support structures and pedagogies appropriate for these *extracurricular* learning needs.

Our point in highlighting these distinctions is that it seems that many scholars use the term *transformative learning* to talk about this second and third way of using TL in practice, rather than an immediate caterpillar-to-butterfly type of immediate and dramatic change. And, not being clear about this distinction has possibly led to the trend that Michelson describes, wherein immediate, dramatic change seems like everyone's expectation; whereas in many situations it would be more appropriate to frame our work in terms of teaching skills and habits that might lead to long-term transformative change (2nd type) or in terms of supporting learners who are likely face transformative learning challenges regardless of whether we are trying to promote it (3rd type). Our scholarship as a discipline would benefit from explicit distinctions about these three ways of thinking about TL in practice.

Part 3: Epistemological Versus Hermeneutic Analysis

We strongly support Michelson's development of the concept of "knower" as an *ethical* one. We also appreciate her suggestion that educators acknowledge, respect, and build on the ways that learners already practice ethical knowing. Michelson (2019) argues for a concept of ethical knower whom she defines as one "who takes responsibility for her own epistemological practices" (p. 150). Developing her juxtaposition between hermeneutics and epistemology, Michelson suggests we restrict our expectation of the ethical knower only to what she calls "epistemological self-awareness." Michelson (2019) describes the ethical knower as one who poses to herself the question: "Why do I believe that such-and-such is true?" instead of "Why do I see the world the way I do?" (p. 143). We are concerned with limiting the concept of an ethical knower to the dimension which Michelson (2019) calls "epistemological" —or taking "responsibility for accepting the validity of the data themselves" (p. 151). For us, the idea of the ethical dimension of knowledge is essential, and it is connected with the premise that an ethical knower is someone who is an actor on multiple levels of dealing with knowledge, epistemological as well as hermeneutical (to use Michelson's categories), recognizing at the same time the deep social embeddedness of knowledge.

How is it possible to separate, even for purposes of analysis, one's responsibilities as an ethical knower from the complex "moral framework within which we interpret information" (Michelson, 2019, p. 150) and also from the embedded ethical–political context in which actual epistemic practice takes place? And how is it possible to offer by this separation a better response to the challenges of modern society (as Michelson asks us to do)? Distinguishing between true and false knowledge claims is essential, but stopping there implies that the same points of fact will inevitably lead to similar

interpretations, and that is obviously not the case. The same facts can be used to make wildly different interpretations. If we are going to focus on the ethical dimension of knowing, then surely one's interpretations, of even "true" facts, is essential. In sum, Michelson's concept of "epistemological self-awareness" is a useful starting point in becoming an "ethical knower," but it is not sufficient.

Because Michelson's article juxtaposes epistemological and hermeneutic analysis, we want to explore this distinction in more detail. We find a useful understanding of hermeneutics from Gadamer (1960/2010). Entering into a dialogue, we all have our preconceptions, or "horizon of meaning," as a part of our linguistic competence and a prerequisite of understanding, and we are connected through language into a common, shared understanding. The hermeneutical circle, which we (can) undergo in the process of learning or communication, can lead us to a "fusion of horizons." That presupposes, according to Gadamer, a general openness and awareness of our own possibly biased fore-meaning. In this sense, hermeneutical dealing with the world is per se dialogical and exposes individuals to meanings that perhaps could not be seen before; while epistemological analysis, as suggested by Michelson, could also be approached as monological. In this sense, hermeneutical analysis helps create a common basis for understanding and action in a shared world (which seems to be an urgent challenge in the era of Trump), while the epistemological approach could be limited to an individual making of meaning, which although might be a useful start, could also allow for the tendency for people of different political orientations to stay within their own echo chambers. In contrast, a dialogic approach is especially important for political understandings and meaning making[6].

The example of a conversation about taxes in Michelson's article illustrates exactly the importance of the hermeneutical dimension of ethical knowing. An epistemological analysis from both conversation partners would have been a useful beginning, as Michelson points out. Had this happened, it might be determined that New York state and property taxes are indeed higher than those in South Carolina, but obviously not ten times higher. Also, it might be determined that breakfasts for hungry children (and similar programs) comprise such a small portion of the state and local budgets that its use as a rationale for substantially higher taxes is not supportable. Perhaps, and hopefully, this epistemological analysis would lead to further investigations into taxes and public spending, which would lead the conversation into a more productive direction rather than remaining on ideological platitudes. This would, as indicated above, be a useful starting point. Eventually, however, facts can be agreed upon, and yet divergent interpretations of those facts can still exist. What would still be missing is an analysis of the interpretation of the facts and experiences, that is, a hermeneutical analysis.

One result of the process of hermeneutical analysis is recognizing which of the "facts" are being given priority, and which ones are being minimized. This recognition can lead to an awareness of the underlying values and assumptions inherent in each position. In the case of taxes, Mike seems to be focused on the value of self-sufficiency, advocating for a social system in which one's efforts matter. The liberal argument would likely show an emphasis on the value of empathy and equality of opportunity. It focuses on current realities of human suffering and social inequity. Both

sides of the conversation would likely agree with the importance of all these values. The question would then become: (a) What is the hierarchy of values for each person? and (b) What are the assumptions that each person is making regarding the need for each value to be emphasized? In approaching the dilemma of public spending and taxation, it is thus crucial for mutual understanding to pose the hermeneutical question: "Why do I see the world the way I do?" (Michelson, 2019, p. 143). Fact-checking alone does not advance the dialogue. What is needed is a dialogue that acknowledges and explores concerns and interpretations from both sides; in this case, the considerations of self-sufficiency, empathy and equity all need to be addressed in the conversation. And, if both sides of the argument acknowledge these competing concerns, there is a better chance of creating more areas of common ground between them, and maybe even more integrated and inclusive perspectives.

Michelson (2019) argues that the hermeneutical practice of "re-interpreting the world" (p. 153) is "perhaps [. . .] just too much to ask right now" because at "this contentious moment, there is insufficient trust and an insufficiently shared basis for dialogue" (p. 153). The result of this recommendation seems to be that we postpone critical dialogue and the examination of one's own interpretative schemes. The first obvious question is as follows: Has it ever been (or would it ever be) better to not intentionally promote the competencies and habits of dialogue and rational discourse? Can we speak about responsible teaching if we "postpone" the ideal of coming closer to the truth (whatever that is) by negotiating contested meanings? Or should our pedagogical attention be placed on fostering the skills and habits that would promote more effective living in a pluralistic society, which include critical assessment of one's own perspectives?

Obviously, we are advocating for the latter. To promote effective participation in a pluralistic democratic society, we as educators of adults need to encourage dialogue across differences in a public space (howsoever designed) and ensure that the plurality of perspectives that exists in the world, including our own, are put under scrutiny. We need to foster rational discourse and (self-)critique, the capacity to endure ambiguity and value pluralism, and simultaneously be able to take responsibility for our own hermeneutic choices. This process includes both epistemological as well as hermeneutic practice. The responsible ethical knower cannot but pursue them both. Learning to identify just the trustworthiness of the information cannot be enough. The need to deal with contradictory perspectives will inevitably arise, and as a society we desperately need to be begin approaching this plurality using the tools of critical analysis and constructive dialogue.

We want to add to the conversation initiated by Michelson by introducing Miranda Fricker's (2007) concepts around "epistemic injustice." Fricker acknowledges that epistemic practices can be accompanied by injustice, caused by the social fabric of a knower's group, community, or society. She asserts therefore that epistemic analysis is not adequately conducted on the individual level, but on the level of social circumstances and constraints. Fricker differentiates between two forms of epistemic injustice: the "testimonial injustice," in which a person is treated unfairly in her capacity as a knowledge producer; and the "hermeneutical injustice," in which a person is wronged in his capacity as a subject of social understanding. The first form of epistemic

injustice, testimonial injustice, arises from an irrational, prejudiced credibility denial, whereby a person's arguments are measured not on the basis of the truth claim but on the speaker's affiliation with a particular group. An example of this form that Fricker offers is when police mistrust, a priori, a Black person because of his skin color.

Hermeneutic injustice occurs when, due to a gap in collective interpretive resources (a lack of concepts), someone is adversely affected because his experiences of suffering cannot be put into words and thus remain unrecognized. An example of this second form of injustice is a person suffering from sexual harassment in a culture that lacks the critical concept for it (Fricker, 2007, p. 1). Fricker's concept of hermeneutical injustice shows that in social discourse an epistemic injustice can arise because individuals lack concepts for describing their experiences, or because existing concepts are inadequate to facilitate understanding. Fricker's approach affirms that questions of ethical knowing are dependent on social understandings, not only on individual epistemic accuracy. Experiencing hermeneutical injustice means that a person's process of making meaning is inadequate because of lacunae of the available conceptual resources; these lacunae hinder the capacity to interpret and understand one's experience. Fricker demands collective efforts to overcome epistemic injustice, thorough interpretation of the contexts and frames in which we are caught. To be called an ethical knower would therefore demand critical dialogue and analysis of how we perceive and interpret information, acknowledging the contexts and constraints of the particular epistemological culture.

A final point for a broader view of the "ethical knower" is the long-term *transformative* power of acts of deep engagement with our knowledge, values, assumptions, and prejudices. This includes the ability to transfer the skills, knowledge, and virtues from our private lives (including work) to our public lives (including the engagement in conversations around politics, etc.). The transfer from private to public is analogous to what Michelson says about Mike and Vinnie's epistemological integrity in their work lives that she implies is not evident in their public views. This is also exactly the transcendence from *oikos*, from the private monological judgment, to the *polis*, the realm of engaging public discussion, which Hannah Arendt requires (to whom Michelson refers in her final section). For Arendt (1963), living a life is indispensably bound to the mandatory political dimension that manifests itself in the constant critical self-reflection caused through one's confrontation with the environment (i.e., with different interpretations of the world), with corresponding judgments about the ways of living together in a society—be it in the era of Trump, of Putin, of the rise of right-wing parties across Europe, or any other difficult and challenging situation. Arendt envisions a constant dialogue across difference in a free public space as a prerequisite for human development. According to Arendt, the rational interpersonal interaction and confrontation with different interpretative schemes in a public space contains a principled possibility of a new beginning ("natality"), of *transformation*, through creative action.

Final Thoughts

We are grateful for the conceptual contributions of Michelson's article and agree that TL theory is not the answer to every educational question (see, e.g., Hoggan, 2019a).

Our discipline will benefit from more homegrown adult education theories, as well as continued elaboration of existing theories. Michelson's article is a step in that direction. We are especially appreciative of the way her article brings to light troubling educational practices and hope our article contributes in productive ways to greater consistency between the literature and practice of transformative education. We recognize the value of Michelson's demand to all of us to think and to exchange ideas about the possible answers our discipline can offer to the difficult challenges of our times.

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Notes

1. The term "transformative learning" refers potentially to many different things (see Hoggan, 2016). Michelson seems to refer primarily to Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. Therefore, in most instances that is how we use the term in our response.
2. We are not saying that TL theory does not have omissions, limitations, or lacunae, but rather that the trends that Michelson describes are not advocated by TL theorists.
3. Habermas himself has called this concept of the ideal speech situation "counterfactual," an idealized vision that is never fully attainable.
4. This criteria of instrumental purposes is of especial importance. Mezirow cited Habermas' differentiation between strategic/instrumental action, which is goal-oriented, and communicative action, which is a "search for truth" and coming to mutual understandings (Mezirow, 1996, p. 165). The question of a strategic/instrumental orientation toward transformational learning processes will be problematized in the following section.
5. In this case, we are conceptualizing TL more broadly: as a metatheory (Hoggan, 2016), rather than Mezirow's specific definition and theory of perspective transformation.
6. We are not saying that Michelson advocated for this monologic approach, but rather that if we are to promote pedagogies aimed at ethical knowing, we would need to ensure a dialogic, hermeneutic approach is used.

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