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SURVEYS AS PRAXIS: A PILOT STUDY ON TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING ASSESSMENT WITH THE LABORATORY EXPERIENCE OF THE THEATRE OF THE OPPRESSED

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Abstract

Transformative learning has been important in the development of college and adult education since Jack Mezirow proposed it more than 40 years ago as a theoretical description of the steps learners undergo in changing their worldviews. From the educator's perspective, transformative learning is when a learner is struck by a new concept or way of thinking and then follows through to make a life change; it supplements more common types of learning such as acquiring facts or learning new skills (Cranton, 2006) [1]. Little quantitative study has been made of the incidence of transformative learning or the ten steps predicted by Mezirow to precede it (Taylor, 2007) [2]. More European involvement in research on transformative learning is needed, given that the theory of transformative learning does not have concrete roots in the conceptual formation of the European adult educators (Kokkos, 2012) [3]. European adult educators' rich scholarship on the social and critical dimensions of adult learning (Bourdieu, Foucault, Mayo) would have much to offer the study of transformative learning theory (Taylor & Cranton, 2013) [4].

The real innovation could be the reintegration of the transformative learning with ideas, theories and methodologies of freirerian pedagogy and of democratic adult education, such as Theatre of Oppressed and Forum Theatre, derived from the theory of Augusto Boal (2005) [5]. Our purpose is to create a collaborative international research to study the processes of transformative learning occurring during university laboratory experiences based on Freire's pedagogical tools and on Boal's Forum Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed with graduating students. This paper presents the international pilot study for the validation of the instrument for assessment of the transformative learning adopting the perspective of the theory of ten precursor steps (Taylor, 2007; Brock, 2011) [6].

Keywords: assessment of transformative learning, international action-research, adult education, critical pedagogy.

1   THE TRASFORMATIVE EVOLUTION OF TRASFORMATIVE LEARNING

1.1   The "theory in progress" of the Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory first emerged on the academic landscape over 35 years ago. Early influences included the work of Kuhn (1962) [7] on paradigms, Freire's (1970) [8] conscientization and Habermas (1971, 1984) [9] [10]. In addition, research about the theory has continued to grow exponentially. Transformative learning was optimistically called a "theory in progress." The optimism for this theory appears to be growing thin and researchers seem to be stuck on a treadmill, repeating the same research over and over again, and making less than satisfactory theoretical progress (Taylor & Snyder, 2012) [11].

Recently Kokkos (2012) [3] conducted a review exploring the degree to which European adult educators incorporate transformative learning as a framework in the development of their research. He concluded: "that the theory of transformative learning does not have concrete roots in the conceptual formation of the European adult educators" (Kokkos, 2012, p. 297) [3]. European adult educators' rich scholarship, instead focuses on the social and critical dimensions of adult learning (Foucault, Mayo), and would have much to offer the study of transformative learning theory.

A concept that is most central to transformative learning and adult learning in general is experience. It is experience, particularly prior experience (that happened in one's past), that is the primary medium of a transformation, and it is the revision of the meaning of experience that is the essence of learning. "Learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised

interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action" (Mezirow, 1996, p. 162) [12]. It is also experience that forms the basis for habitual expectations (ideologies, beliefs, values), creating the lens from which learners perceive, interpret and make meaning of their world (Mezirow, 1991) [13]. Despite the centrality of experience to transformative learning theory, as a construct it is rarely defined or critically examined in research about transformative learning. Questions are raised, such as: What constitutes an experience (which should lend insight into what is not an experience)? What gives meaning to an experience? What distinguishes a transformative experience from other types of experiences?

This psychological orientation is also the basis of much of the research about transformative learning theory (Taylor, 1997, 2007) [14]. It is reflected in the exploration of significant prior experiences, the impact of more immediate experiences (individual and group) created in the classroom designed to foster transformative learning, and the degree of experience and its relationship to transformative learning.

In summary, experience is described in some interesting ways that can help focus research and theory development:

- Past experience that shapes who we are and our meaning perspectives and habits of mind
- Cultural experience and/or social/historical experience that may be unarticulated but still shapes the meaning of perspectives
- Contextual experience, related to organizations, workplace, and the nature of a job
- Discrepant experiences that contradict our past and cultural experiences leading to reflection

Historically, three constructs have been seen as central to transformative learning theory, critical reflection, dialogue, and experience (Mezirow, 1991) [13]. Learners' experience is seen as socially constructed, as constituting the starting point for dialogue, as the essential medium through which a transformation is promoted and developed, and as leading to critical reflection where learners question "the integrity of deeply held assumptions and beliefs based on prior experience" (Taylor, 2009, p. 7) [15].

Another important component of transformative learning is empathy; empathy fosters transformative learning, empathic teachers may foster the process of the transformative learning and empathy is also at the base of inter-subjective transformative experiences. According to Mezirow, transformative learning is learning that transforms problematic frames of reference — sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets) — to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Such frames of reference are better than others because they are more likely to generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Mezirow, 2003, pp. 58-59) [16].

Weimer (2012) [17] asks some important questions about transformative learning in practice, for example: "Can learning experiences be designed so that transformative learning happens more regularly? What sequence of activities best transforms dependent learners into independent learners?" (p. 439). These are the kinds of things that all practitioners would like to know, along with the more fundamental question of what brings learners to a position where they are open to engagement in such learning experiences and activities.

Unfortunately, transformative learning theory may be accused of stagnation and lack of theoretical progression. This stagnation is the result of several phenomenon: a confusion about research paradigms, an overreliance on a research methodology in which participants are interviewed retrospectively and a thematic inductive analysis is conducted, the misinterpretation of kinds of data as research paradigms, the reliance on secondary sources and the subsequent narrowing of the field, and, at the same time, the expansion of theory into a number of directions with little attention being paid to how the expansion contributes to previous works.

The typical methodology in research on transformative learning falls into the basic interpretive methodology; that is, the researcher interviews a small number of individuals in a specific context or related to a specific issue (retrospectively), does a thematic analysis of the interview data, and reports on four or five themes that appear in the data.

Research among 205 educators (King, 2011) [18] indicated that learning educational technology has the potential to deeply impact educators' perspectives and practice. The results of the research demonstrated a model of transformational learning to guide professional development in educational

technology. This model poses a different framework that has been successful among educators learning educational technology across disciplines. Educational technology becomes more than gaining skills or theory, and instead becomes an exploration of new possibilities and solutions to curriculum, teaching and learning, and ways of understanding.

The research questions initially considered in this study were 1) What proportion of the sampled population of educators experienced a perspective transformation in regard to technology use in their profession? and 2) What experiences characterized any perspective transformation? Based on the emerging analysis of the data this second research question was further refined to be: What common experiences framed and characterized the development and learning in educational technology among these educators? The 205 educators participated in professional development in educational technology over a seven-year period. A mixed quantitative and qualitative model was used to analyze the data source and identify emergent themes of change and perspective transformation (Cresswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) [19] [20]. This research included two phases: quantitative analysis of an initial, screening survey and later, in-depth analysis of several sources of qualitative data. This mixed model utilized surveys, journal entries, reflective essays and interviews as data sources. Using several methods to gather data made possible the triangulation of emergent themes.

For the initial phase of the research, an adapted and piloted survey instrument, the Learning Activities Survey Professional Development Technology Format (LAS-PDT), was used to identify those who had experienced a perspective transformation (King, 1998) [18]. The instrument's reliability and validity were again confirmed through the use of multiple sources of data to confirm analysis, member checks, and the validation with an independent coding made by another researcher (King, 1998, 2002) [21].

For this study, the data gathered included 205 completed surveys, 748 journal entries, 58 interview transcribed interviews, and 25 reflective essays about the experience of learning and professional development.

Gathering both quantitative and qualitative data allowed study of the multi-dimensional qualities of perspectives transformation.

In the preliminary, quantitative analysis of data frequencies and proportions of responses were determined. In the second phase, the coding of free responses, essays and interviews was done. As these data were examined further for common relationships and themes, a model of educators' training and learning emerged: the "journey of transformation" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) [20]. The responses are grouped in a matrix, through which to observe the stages of perspectives transformation in a sort of journey of change and transformation.

The linkages between Mezirow's theory of transformational learning and educators' learning journeys are demonstrated in their *development*, the *disequilibrium* promoting learning, learning that includes *reflection,* and the construction of *structures/meaning.*

Rather than an isolated learning moment, the journey emphasizes that there is a direction that some take - a general path which leads to perspective transformation - as they engage in adult learner-grounded professional development in educational technology. Similar to our understanding of the diffusion *process* of innovation, the model is one of a journey. In contrast to the same literature, however, this model is one of fundamental transformations of perspectives, ways of understanding, and empowerment that goes beyond technology (the innovation) itself and is best explained through transformational learning theory. The journey of transformation is one of reflection, questioning, analysis, development, empowerment and promise that integrates with the theory of transformative learning.

Understanding the journey of transformation's dynamics allows us consideration of how transformational learning might be alternatively conceptualized, and to explore how it may be otherwise experienced in specific settings.

Another contribution to the theory in progress of the transformative learning, could derive from a quantitative study of college students, conducted in 2005, 2008, and 2010 (Brock, 2011) [6]. The research has developed a theoretical model that demonstrates how the ten theoretical precursor steps of transformative learning could predict its occurrence. Transformative learning has been shown to be an effective component of leadership among teachers (Harris, Lowery-Moore, & Farrow, 2008) [22], in the operating room (McNaron, 2009) [23], and in executive education. Creating a climate designed to maximize transformative learning may help undergraduate students adjust more readily to a fast-changing workplace (Wills, 1994) [24] and provide tools for future leaders facing 21st century

challenges. Little quantitative study has been made of the incidence of transformative learning or the ten steps predicted by Mezirow to precede it (Taylor, 2007) [6].

These ten steps are: (1) a disorienting dilemma; (2) a critical reflection on assumptions; (3) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change; (4) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; (5) self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame; (6) provisional trying of new roles; (7) planning of a course of action; (8) acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; (9) building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; and (10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 1978, 2000) [25] [26]. These ten steps may not necessarily be linear (Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1994) [27] [28]. The purpose of this research was to add confirmation to the usefulness of the ten precursor steps proposed by Mezirow (1978) [29] in predicting transformative learning, especially in the college classroom. His original research was among adults even though other transformative learning researchers have explored the usefulness of this model in studying college students (Brock, 2010; Cranton, 2006) [30] [1]. The research questions being addressed include the following: What is the relationship of the precursor steps to the report of transformative learning among college students?

1. Are some combinations of precursor steps better predictors of transformative learning than others? If so, what are these? 2. Are there differences in reported transformative learning among demographic groups of college students? If so, what are these?

A series of studies measured the incidence of transformative learning and each of the ten precursor steps as well as demographics and college majors. Samples of undergraduate populations were gathered in 2005, 2008, and 2010 from two colleges in a large metropolitan area in the Northeast United States via an anonymous web survey. Data describing students' experiences were collected using a quantitative survey, previously validated through use of an expert panel and multiple pre-tests (King, 1998) [18]. It covered the ten steps leading to transformative learning, the reporting of transformative learning, as well as questions on demographics and college major. Recall of each these precursor steps was measured by check boxes and included the option to say "none," followed by a question on whether or not transformative learning occurred while at this institution. Those respondents reporting transformative learning were asked to explain in their own words how they experienced it. These open-ended responses were used to confirm that students reporting transformative learning understood that it was not merely learning a new tool. As in King's instrument, the precursor step of reflection included two options: reflection followed by changing assumptions and reflection where assumptions were not changed. Demographic measures were determined by checkboxes or filling in the number for age and semesters completed.

Are some combinations of precursor steps better predictors of transformative learning than others? If so, what are these? In order to address the relationship between specific precursor steps and transformative learning, likelihood ratio tests (Casella & Berger, 2001) [31] were conducted between each of the ten precursor steps and reported transformative learning. The step of reflection was significant in predicting transformative learning in all three waves. In 2005 and 2010 critical reflection resulting in changed assumptions significantly predicted transformative learning; in 2005 this precursor step was much more important than other steps. In the 2008 and 2010 waves reflection that occurred without changing assumptions also significantly predicted not reporting transformative learning. A disorienting dilemma was predictive in the first two waves. Trying on new roles and acquiring skills/knowledge to implement a plan significantly predicted transformative learning in the 2005 and 2010 waves. Building confidence was a significant predictor in the 2010 wave. The following steps showed no significant relationship to transformative learning in any of the waves: recognizing discontent shared, exploring new roles (as contrasted to trying new roles), self-examination with feelings of guilt/shame, planning a new course of action, and reintegrating to life.

The precursor step of reflection was the most consistent predictor, positive where it was reported to change assumptions, negative if this reflection did not change assumptions. The implication is that forcing more reflection in the classroom may accelerate transformative learning. Further, educational techniques stimulating four other of the ten transformative learning precursor steps may be particularly helpful in fostering this type of learning. These four precursor steps are disorienting dilemmas, trying on new roles, acquiring skills to make a change, and building confidence. However, it should be necessary to investigate how to promote educative paths of transformative learning in formal contexts with future professionals, teachers or psychologists, who are still in training.

A possible solution could be the inclusion of the study on transformative learning under the critical paradigm in educational research. In the critical paradigm, researchers ask, "what could or should be." Critical researchers challenge the status quo, question social norms, and look for ways to improve practice through action and the involvement of those people who are affected by the situation being investigated (Merriam & Simpson, 2000) [32].

The critical paradigm assumes subjective knowledge, but it takes this one step further to assume that participants are co-researchers. That is, they not only construct knowledge but they engage in the understanding of others' knowledge construction. The assumption of the frame of critical paradigm does not mean the exclusive use of qualitative and interpretative data, but often includes a variety of kinds of data. So, researchers who wish to develop innovative research on transformative learning, are invited to explore new horizons open from the integration of qualitative and quantitative data, from the development of international collaboration, and from the inclusion of the construct under the aegis of critical paradigm.

We try to answer to this call with our international research project, which try to combine mixed methodologies for the assessment of transformative learning and try to integrate laboratorial experiences (carried out with methodologies of social democratic education, such as the Theatre of the Oppressed) with the evaluation of the transformation of meaningful perspectives in the participants according to the theory of the transformative learning.

1.2   The Theatre of the Oppressed: an experience of Transformative Learning?

This work presents the experience of an inter-continental action-research acted in a comparative path that involves - the LEPE laboratories (Laboratory of epistemologies of Education) - of the University of Naples "Federico II" and the research project of university extension EPNOL (Educacao Popular no Luar) - of the - Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, and requires the collaboration of Professor Brock, Ass. Professor and Interim Dean at the Touro Graduate School of Business in New York.

Starting from biographical and narrative experience, this action research aims to realize laboratories based on reflection regarding educational practices and their transformative potential, according to the transformative learning theory. Methodologies of The Theatre of Oppressed and the Forum Theatre, derived from the theory of Augusto Boal (1972; 1992; 1995; 2008) [33] [34] [35] [36], are re-created in order to deconstruct and denounce social and political power relationship. Boal does not dissociate social research from the political action of emancipation from social oppressions.

Like in Bertolt Brecht, in Boal the educational sense of theatre is political, but it is not limited to the scene, because he focuses his reading also on the audience, on the possibility that it can intervene in the actions, suggest ideas, take part in the event. By doing so, he intensifies the viewer's participation in the scene. He changes the spectator-actor relationship, like the educator Paulo Freire has done with the professor-student relationship, practicing a dialogic relationship, which was open, circular, and, therefore, with critical potentialities (Vittoria, 2011) [37]. We are experimenting using Boal and Freire's proposals not only in university courses, but also in social projects related to the university extension in Rio de Janeiro.

Augusto Boal founded the Theatre of the Oppressed in Brazil at the beginning of the nineteen-sixties in a period of fervor of social movements. After persecution and torture by the military dictatorship that took power in 1964 with a coup backed by the U.S. government, Boal exiled himself to Argentina, then to Peru, where he participated along with Paulo Freire in a great literacy campaign, then obtained refuge in Portugal and then in France where he settled for many years and founded the Centre d'étude et de diffusion des techniques actives d' expression. The climate of repression adopted by Latin American military dictatorships during the sixties and seventies did not concern only Boal, but large sections of the country's democratic base. Boal returned to Brazil at the beginning of the eighties, with the redemocratization of the country, he contributed to the spread of Popular Centers for Culture, founded the Centro de Teatro do Oprimido, currently active in the city of Rio de Janeiro. He passed away in 2009 after publishing his masterpiece "A estética do oprimido."

To explain the genesis and structure of the Theater of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal has used the metaphor of the tree, whose most remote roots are politics, history, philosophy and ethics that, through the tools of games, words, images and sounds and nurtured by multiplication and solidarity, give life to the different techniques he created and tested: the Forum Theatre, the Image Theatre, the Journal Theatre, the Rainbow of Desire, The Invisible Theatre, and the Legislative Theatre. The roots

give life to the tree, they nurture it, and they are its foundations. In a concrete sense, ethics, politics, philosophy, history, solidarity, and multiplication are the vital energies of the Theatre.

According to Boal, politics arises inside us; through theatre it can disclose itself to the world outside. Rather than the interiorization of external ideologies or delegation of responsibility, politics is the emersion and externalization of the sense of justice.

In recent decades, the transformative potential of the popular theatre and the Theater of the Oppressed in particular, have made it an educational tool in the most fragile contexts, since it can create instruments of dialogue and solidarity. It allows one to imagine and simulate several action options and build a shared desire for social change. There are also experiments in university didactics to foster the development of skills related to the interpretation of the social environment through the narration of significant events and subsequent dramatization. As an educational tool, the Theatre of the Oppressed allows building links between abstract theories and everyday experience, in order to develop an understanding of the social elements involved in educational processes in search of change. Very often students are convinced that we can do very little to change situations in school settings and in society in general. But taking an active role in building the dramatization that examines alternative social structures, they can be encouraged to adopt a more optimistic prospective on their potential participation in social change (Hardy, T., 1989) [38].

In a previous research (Strollo, Vittoria, 2012; Strollo, Romano, 2013) [39] [40], the performance has been preceded by meeting workshops for students attending the Social Pedagogy course and the University Extension. During these meetings students, already accustomed to working in groups by virtue of their common participation in several previous laboratory experiments, report episodes of oppression that occurred during their school years; they share narrative and autobiographical texts, among which the one that will be staged is chosen. This is a narrative phase of extreme importance because it is not limited to the story about the oppression, but it extends to the evaluation of the experience carried out with regard to participants' perception of the oppression in and out the school context. So, each step of research is accompanied by students' narratives and their "logbooks", written during and at the conclusion of the workshop in order to reconsider the outcomes of the intervention from the transformative point of view.

Through games, exercises, improvisations, group work, using the body, voice and movement, the selected situation of conflict, discussed during the narrative phase, is reconstructed and acted. These stories represent the oppression in the relationship between teacher and students that allows movements from narration to dramatization. Once at the public presentation to the many participants in the seminar, they represent the scene following the techniques of the Forum Theatre. In a university classroom, the audience is composed of students, researchers, teachers and professors who participate in a seminar on "Pedagogies of liberation." The majority of participants do not know the Forum Theater yet; therefore, they are not aware of the kind of dynamics that we would have put into action. The methodology devised by Augusto Boal interrupts the scene during the performance and asks the audience to recognize the situation of oppression, trying to identify an oppressed and an oppressor. Through questions, the audience becomes an active participant in the performance, they wonder about the real situation represented and begin to encode and decode that reality represented in the stage movement. It is not easy to say who is the oppressor and who is the oppressed; in a metaphor for the oppressor-oppressed dialectics it is known that the oppressed, for the fact of being oppressed, can oppress and vice-versa the oppressor may be so because he/she has suffered oppression (Vittoria, 2011) [37]. The Theatre Forum includes a discussion of possible solutions to the conditions of oppression. We query the audience: if you were the oppressed, what would you do? How would you react? What would you think to do to resolve the conflict?
This is a very important step for the " forum " because the " spectator " is not only motivated to reveal his/her thoughts, but also to take the stage in place of the oppressed. He goes from words to action; by taking the stage, words become performed. Word ... action ... word. In this way the boundary between the spectator and the actor, thought and action, stage and audience is crossed, and like Boal says, there are no more spectators and actors, but spect-actors.

The search is not for a "happy ending", but for reflection on relations of power and of tools for dialogue (of which also conflict is part) that could alter it. Taking the stage, however, represented a moment of crisis of one's own certainties and an abrupt transition from words to action. The Forum Theatre is generally used in contexts (such as social movements) to analyze contradictions and look for opportunities for non-violent political action, to be conscious of one's own actions and to create a collective direction of the actions that respect subjectivity and differences.

After this acted phase, there was a return to students' narrative, through the reading and the analysis of their logbooks and reflections. The logbooks were subjected to qualitative content analysis prepared by a panel of three independent judges, two involved in the experience and one external, which have consistently discussed their observations. This triangulation allowed overcoming the possible tendency to interpret evidence in terms that tended to confirm the initial expectations and speculations of the researchers who were directly involved in the experience.

In our current action-research, we try to integrate methodologies of the Forum Theatre and of the Journal Theatre, with an instrument for the assessment of transformative learning, the King's Learning Activities Survey (King, 1998) [18], which is not yet validated in Italy. In order to carry out our international project, we have to validate the questionnaire with a study of validation with an Italian sample, and then, to adopt this instrument to show empirically the transformative potential of the Theatre of the Oppressed in university formal contexts.

The Learning Activities Survey (King, 1998; 2000) [41] has been translated and adapted in Italian by the research group of the Lepe Laboratory of University of Naples "Federico II." In the Italian version, the 4-page survey presents free-responses, checklists, completion statements and extended responses to identify potential transformational experiences educators may have had through the professional development sessions. Based on self-disclosure, the survey questions probe possible experiences and draw out responses to indicate the nature, scope and details of those experiences.

In addition to the survey, a structured grid of questions about the multiple levels of the Theatre of the Oppressed has been created; the grid of questions explores the dimensions of the written of the script of the story of the oppression, of the dramatic staging, of the role of the group and of the transformation due to the experience. Moreover, data from the administration of the Learning Activities Survey and from the administration of the structured grid of questions will be compared with the textual analysis of students' logbooks. Actually, we have conducted a study of validation with a sample of 60 Italian undergraduate students, who are attending the final year of the degree in Psychology at University of Naples, "Federico II". They are taking part in the Lepe workshops of "Education to the listening," and are a sample of future educators comparable to the sample of the research of creation and validation of the Learning Activities Survey, led by King (King, 1998) [18]. Ass. Professor Brock, from the Touro Graduate School of Business of New York, is following in supervision the study of translation and validation of King's questionnaire with the Italian sample.

The Forum Theatre offers a possibility of democratizing relationships and to re-invent narrative languages, corporal narrative languages, preserving its educational and formative purposes. But that's not all: the theatre practice is presented as aiming at transformative learning.

Among the factors affecting the epistemological perspectives, there are the extent of awareness and reflexivity, which contribute to the definition of the patterns of meaning, that is to say the set of knowledge, beliefs, evaluative judgments and feelings that guide our actions. They need a continuous critical examination after which it is possible to operate a perspective transformation that generates new modes of action. It is through reflection and criticism that it is possible, therefore, to become aware of the specific assumptions on which a distorted or incomplete prospective of meaning is based, transforming it through a reorganization of the meaning. The process of clarification/revision of the modes of action begins with a pattern of doubtful or problematic meaning, with a "disorienting dilemma." and proceeds through exploration, analysis, memory, intuition, imagination, to the construction of a new interpretation. That generates a reflexive change in the original schemes of meaning, enriching, transforming and integrating it when the new interpretation effectively brings an entire perspective of meaning into question, it might lead to a perspective transformation. This process gives origin to emancipatory learning that consists in freedom from instinctual, linguistic, epistemological, institutional and environmental forces, which limit our options and control over our lives. We reach this emancipation by critically examining our assumptions.

We need to remember that Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970) [8] emphasized the need to provide native populations with an education that was simultaneously new and modern (rather than traditional) and anti-colonial (not simply an extension of the culture of the colonizer).

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) [8], Freire, reprising the oppressors–oppressed distinction, differentiates between the two positions in an unjust society, the oppressor and the oppressed. Freire champions that education should allow the oppressed to regain their sense of humanity, in turn overcoming their condition. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that in order for this to occur, the oppressed individual must play a role in their liberation. Likewise, the oppressors must also be willing to rethink their way of life and to examine their own role in the oppression if true liberation is to occur;

"those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (Freire, 1970, p. 60) [8].

Freire believed education to be a political act that could not be divorced from pedagogy. Teachers and students must be made aware of the "politics" that surround education. The way students are taught and what they are taught serves a political agenda. Teachers, themselves, have political notions they bring into the classroom. Freire believed that education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing — of knowing that they know and knowing that they don't .

In terms of actual pedagogy, Freire is best known for his attack on what he called the "banking" concept of education, in which the student was viewed as an empty account to be filled by the teacher. He notes that "it transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power" (Freire, 1970, p. 77). Freire's work, however, layed the foundation for what is now called critical pedagogy. According to Freire, the system of dominant social relations creates a culture of silence that instills a negative, silenced and suppressed self-image into the oppressed. The learner must develop a critical consciousness in order to recognize that this culture of silence is created to oppress.

Freire addresses a serious dilemma of democracy, the constitution of democratic citizenship (2008). He suggested a model of diversity and crossing border in education which could be a central tenet in the discussion of transformative social justice learning (Torres, 2008) [42]. According to a Freirean perspective, transformative social justice learning could be defined as a social, political and pedagogical practice, that will take place when people reach a deeper and more complex understanding of themselves and of their world, and when they are prepared to take action upon new understanding. Transformative social justice learning is based on the assumptions of critical theory that most social relationships are power and domination relationships, and that language constitutes identities, from a simbolic perspective. So, in this conceptual framework, transformative social justice learning tries to explores rituals, myths, icons, totems, symbols and taboos in education and society seeking to understand and transform social agency and structures. Transformative social justice learning could be perceived as a form of social educational practice derived from the relevance of Freirean pedagogy of the oppressed in the evolution of the theory on transformative learning.

Moreover, Mezirow himself is grateful to Freire for his influence on his theory, and currently one of the most important aims for the progress of the theory on transformative learning is to grasp its connections with democratic adult education, founded on the Freire and Boal's teaching. Freire [8] articulated a theory of transformative learning which he referred to as coscientization or consciousness-raising (Dirkx, 1998) [43]. Critical consciousness refers to a process in which learners develop the ability to analyze, pose questions, and start acting on the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives. Through the power of dialogue and problem-posing, learners develop awareness of structures within their society that may be contributing to inequality and oppression, and that is reflected in their speeches. For this process, it is necessary action and reflection in transactional or dialectical relationship with each other: that is the meaning of the educational praxis. The Theatre of the Oppressed is a formative praxis which leads participants to consciousness-raising, and our interest is to show how it could be a transformative practice under the aegis of transformative learning.

Mezirow helped to refine the focus of transformational learning as he describes five major developmental "movements" as critical reflection, determining something is true by using empirical methods (if it involves instrumental learning), arriving at more justified beliefs through continuing discourse (if communicative learning), taking action on the transformed perspective and acquiring a disposition to critically reflect on assumptions, seek validation through discourse and to put transformed insight into action (Mezirow, 2009) [43]. This summary draws attention to reflection, dialogue, new perspectives, new ways of understanding, and resultant action. By focusing on these "high points" one can recognize a holistic pattern that describes the flow of the transformative process.

As one further examines transformational learning, its constructivist elements emerge as one considers how and why adult learners reflect, refine, and build new connections or new perspectives (Cranton, 1996; Kegan, 2000) [44] [45]. The facilitation of the development of these new "connections" is a major impact of transformative learning upon learning experiences. The instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory categories of learning provide a valuable frame from which to further examine these experiences and "connections." So, the Theatre of the Oppressed could be an

emancipatory instrument to promote transformative learning not only for university students, but above all, for future conscious global citizens.

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