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Musings and Reflections on the Meaning, Context, and Process of Transformative Learning
A Dialogue Between John M. Dirkx and Jack Mezirow

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Jack Mezirow and John Dirkx engage in a dialogue in which they explore the similarities and differences between their views of transformative learning. Mezirow describes a rational process of learning that transforms an acquired frame of reference. Dirkx focuses on the nature of the self—a sense of identify and subjectivity—which he sees as soul work or inner work.

Keywords: transformative learning; transformation process; frame of reference; epistemic assumption; self-knowledge; affective learning

At the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference held at Michigan State University from October 6 to 9, 2005, a session for the full conference titled "Whole Group Learning: Integration of Theories" took place in which John Dirkx and Jack Mezirow engaged in a dialogue facilitated by Patricia Cranton. We decided to continue this dialogue for the readers of the *Journal of Transformative Education*. We carried on with the dialogue by e-mail and e-mail attachments over the 2 months following the conference. The dialogue began when Patricia asked Jack Mezirow and John Dirkx to provide brief overviews of their perspectives on transformative learning theory.

Jack Mezirow

Here is how I see the process of transformative learning. This rational process of learning within awareness is a metacognitive application of critical thinking that transforms an acquired *frame of reference*—a mind-set or worldview of orienting assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs, and concepts—by assessing its epistemic assumptions.

This process makes frames of reference more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change. Frames with these qualities generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action.

Most of the process of learning occurs outside of awareness and may include emotional, intuitive, symbolic, imaginistic, and/or contemplative modes of learning. The transformative learning process within awareness involves

1. recognition that an alternative way of understanding may provide new insights into a problem;
2. context awareness of the sources, nature, and consequences of an established belief;
3. critical reflection of the established belief's supporting epistemic assumptions;
4. validating a new belief by an empirical test of the truth of its claims, when feasible, or by a broad-based, continuing, discursive assessment of its justification to arrive at a tentative best judgment;
5. coping with anxiety over the consequences of taking action; and
6. taking reflective action on the validated belief.

This process enhances one's disposition and insight for making meaning through transforming awareness—an objective of adult education.

At the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference, the following common contexts of transformative learning were represented:

- adult development, psychological and spiritual;
- ideology;
- psychotherapy;
- religion;
- health;
- art;
- higher and adult education and popular education;
- family;
- social action;
- community;
- social movements;
- organizations;
- disabilities;
- mentoring;
- conflict resolution;
- race, gender, and class;
- democratic citizenship; and
- intercultural contexts.

Many contexts involve *practical reasoning*—reason directed toward action rather than figuring how the facts stand—determining how to figure out what to do and how to do it. Contextual factors and learning outside awareness influence, but should not attempt to redefine, the process of transformative learning within awareness that they have in common.

Transformative learning may be epochal or incremental and may involve objective (often task-oriented) or subjective (often self-reflective) reframing. Subjective reframing often requires the support of others, a positive self-concept and freedom from intense anxiety. Immobilizing anxiety associated with transformative learning may require the help of a psychotherapist.

There was considerable interest at the conference in the critically important dimension of learning outside awareness (Weiss, 1987; Yorks & Kasl, 2006). There was particular interest in studying the symbolic contents of the unconscious. A definition of transformative learning that explicitly articulates this concern was that of Dean Elias (1997), discussed at the conference:

> Transformative Learning is the expansion of consciousness through the transformation of world views and the specific capacities of the self: transformative learning is facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconsciousness and critically analyzing underlying premises. (p. 3)
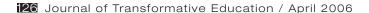
My take on this is that it is important to recognize and understand how learning is shaped outside awareness, but the essential dimension of any definition of transformative learning—especially for adult educators—must include explicit recognition of the foundational process, within awareness, involving critical assessment of epistemic assumptions.

John M. Dirkx

The perspective on adult learning from which I have been working for the past 20 years reflects a focus on the nature of the self, the various ways we have come to think about and understand our senses of self, our senses of identify, our subjectivity. I have come to refer to this view of transformative learning as soul work or inner work (Dirkx, 1997). This view suggests a more integrated and holistic understanding of subjectivity, one that reflects the intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual dimensions of our being in the world. This integrated view also seeks to account for the ways in which the social, cultural, and embodied as well as the deeply personal and transpersonal aspects of our being potentially play out in the process of transformative learning. In this sense, it is consistent with and articulates the work of other scholars of adult learning who have similar interests but perhaps somewhat different theoretical approaches, such as Mezirow (1991, 2000), Cranton (2000), Cranton and Roy (2003), and Yorks and Kasl (2006).

My focus, however, departs from common conceptions in adult and higher education of the process of transformative learning. I call it transformative learning, but I hesitate in using that term because it is used by so many others to refer to and describe something that has no real bearing on or resemblance to what I will set forth here. Those of us who take seriously the "transformative" in transformative learning are interested in a kind of "deep" learning that challenges existing, taken-for-granted assumptions, notions, and meanings of what learning is about. In exploring the nature of deep learning, some writers focus on the cognitive, epistemic, and sociocultural dimensions of the process. My interests revolve around a kind of learning that integrates our experiences of the outer world, including the experiences of texts and subject matter, with the experience of our inner worlds. Although my focus is unabashedly on the subjective, the goal is to develop understanding of this subjective world that is fundamentally human and archetypal. Many of our great psychodynamic scholars used their own inner lives and those around them to explore more deeply the complex and troubling phenomena presented by the human psyche (Freud, 1955; Jung, 1965).

THE INNER COMMUNITY OF THE SELF

Now this idea of an *inner world* and its exploration might seem a bit mystical and vague. But we all sense, at varying levels, that we have private lives, personal dimensions of our being that carry on apart from the buzzing cacophony of what is happening around us. Our senses of these inner worlds also reflect varying levels of our awareness of them. On one hand, we often hold very personal and private thoughts, beliefs, and values that we allow only a few, if any, others to know about. We know them and are fully conscious of them and the ways in which they shape and influence our being in the world. But it is not this aspect of our inner worlds that is of concern here. Rather, I focus more on that shadowy inner world, that part of our being that shows up in seemingly disjointed, fragmentary, and difficult to understand dreams, of spontaneous fantasies that often break through to consciousness in the middle of carefully orchestrated conversation, deep feelings and emotions that erupt into our waking lives with a force that surprises even us, let alone those who know us. I want to know more about that part of the inner world that volunteers questions without being asked, offers comments uninvited on our behavior, conscious thoughts, or our creations. I want to know more about the censor and judge who apparently hold residence within my inner world, the parent and the young child, the trickster, the deviant, the man behind the curtain. In varying ways, all of these personalities seem to reside within my inner world, forming a kind of community of which I seem to be a part (Hillman, 1975).

But my part in this community is different than theirs. The "I" of which I speak here mediates between this inner community and the outer world. It is conscious of both worlds, although not so conscious of the inner community. But it senses that it is there. At times, I feel its presence in powerful ways, but other times, its presence seems shrouded in a veil of fog, a kind of opaqueness that stubbornly conceals the source of the voices that pierce the dark surround of this inner world,

like a powerful dream that lingers on waking, its story line, characters, and images just beyond our conscious grasp. Voices from this inner world continuously nag me with questions about the meaning of my life, of the work that I do, of relationships. It calls into question my authenticity, my integrity, at times my very sense of who I think I am.

The characters that occupy and lend a felt presence to this inner world don't speak with one voice. At times, I hear them saying to me that I am falling short of expectations, not measuring up in the eyes of others. They pretend to know what others must think of me and eagerly pass this information on to me, reminding me of the ways in which I don't meet expectations. But this voice is not alone. No sooner do these messages reach consciousness than they are joined by another voice, decrying my attention to such matters, wondering why I always think of myself in terms of what I think others must think of me, why I think happiness is achieved by living up to the standards of others who are, at best, remote members of my own world. This inner world is composed of multiple voices, multiple identities (Clark & Dirkx, 1999) that often relay mixed and even conflicting messages to the more conscious me that mediates between them and the outer world.

In contrast to this tumultuous, conflictual state of affairs, this inner world also seems a place of rest, peace, a kind of sacred sanctuary. At times, it conveys to me a visceral understanding of the beauty and mystery that is our being in the world, a depth of acknowledgement that sends chills through my shoulders and down my spine and raises bumps on the surface of my skin. My inner world grasps in an instant the magnificence of a moonrise, the stark contrast of the towering mountains arising from the depths of the ocean floor, the incredible power of a rushing mountain waterfall. It is from this inner world that spring questions and wonder about the meaning of life, about what we are here for and where we go after our time here is done—questions and wonder about God.

EXPRESSION OF THE INNER WORLD
IN OUR EXPERIENCE OF THE "TEXT"

This inner world seems to carry a power in one's life that stands in quiet contrast to our public acknowledgement of its presence in our individual and collective lives. Certainly, it reveals its presence through art, poetry, music, theater, and film (Hockley, 2001). Often, we are drawn to such works in inexplicable ways, held captive by them for varying lengths of time, seemingly spellbound by their messages—our inner worlds refracted through the lens of image and metaphor and story.

But, in teaching and learning, it also reveals itself in more subtle ways (Tompkins, 1996). As we read, we are drawn to certain passages in the text and not others. We seek to understand and make sense of a statement of fact. I read in Paul Elie's (2003) collective biography that Walker Percy, the novelist, died on May 10, 1990, the last of whom Elie referred to as the "Catholic writers." The statement makes me pause in my reading. I set the book aside, obviously sent into reverie. Beyond the facts of this statement, what does it mean to me? I search my life for ways that I can find meaning in such a statement. In many ways, my life seems in-

terwoven with his, at least the last part of his life. When I left college, I read many of his books. Like Percy and many of the characters in his stories, I have wondered about the meaning of my life, of my faith, of life and death. His death is a day after my birthday. What was I doing in 1990? What was my life like as this man, someone I came to greatly admire, left his earthly presence behind? I struggle to find something on which I can hang the significance that this statement seems to hold for me.

Such, then, is the interaction between texts and our inner lives. My focus is to better understand this interaction and relationship—how our inner lives shape and influence the ways in which we make sense of our lives, of our being in the world. From this understanding, we want to develop a deeper understanding of how we may honor and give voice to this relationship within the context of both formal and informal learning, how we might provide for curricular and pedagogical experiences that more fully integrate the presence of this inner world with what we experience from without.

Whereas the curricula and instructional processes within higher and adult education have traditionally focused on using the course content to deepen our intellectual or cognitive capacities, consideration of the life of the inner world directs our attention to the imaginative and emotional dimensions of our being, of connecting with and integrating the powerful feelings and images that often arise within the context of our pursuit of intellectual and cognitive growth (Dirkx, 2001). As we do this, we are inevitably drawn to the spiritual implications of our learning, life, and work. As we tune into the inner world and how it relates to and interacts with our outer worlds, through our sensitivity and responsiveness to these feelings and images, we also become aware of more powerful forces and dynamics at work in our lives, forces and feel beyond us, as if we are living out parts of a larger script, one in which we are a key player but not the whole play, one in which we seem to be part of a larger whole. Learning that is transformative is in part directed to deepening our understanding of and work with these dynamics and relationships. This perspective on transformative learning directs us to both the process and the outcomes of learning, but it insists that we think of transformative learning as a kind of stance toward one's being in the world. This process and journey may occasionally be marked with sudden and even provocative experiences. More likely, however, as we tune into this dimension of our being, we will gain a deeper respect for the power and enchantment of everyday experiences, and foster a more imaginative engagement with these experiences (Nafisi, 2003).

NURTURING SOUL AS THE AIM OF EDUCATION

My work, then, focuses on the movement and play of this inner world in the contexts of teaching and learning in higher and adult education. It seeks to restore the *soul* to the world of education, to advocate an education of the soul. In the everydayness of study—of listening to lectures, participating in small-group work, practicing a new skill, or reading and studying texts associated with our learning goals—we begin to find the presence of soul. And such discoveries deepen the meaning of our experiences, our relationships with others, and, fundamentally,

our relationships with ourselves. We are no longer merely pursuing learning to check off a requirement, to earn a certain grade, or to meet the expectations of a certification board. Although these may be aspects of the outer world of our learning, they become merely a part of a broader landscape of learning made more vivid and alive through our awareness of and work with our inner world.

Our focus here, then, is on meaning. Meaning, of course, is a traditional way of thinking about learning. Here, however, we turn our gaze not to the meaning that is supposedly revealed in the author's text or the professor's lectures. Rather, we seek to better understand the kinds of meaning that, as we pursue the readings of the author's texts and professor's lectures, well up within the human heart and spirit (Britzman, 1998). Taking our inner lives seriously within teaching and learning in higher and adult education contributes to and deepens our sense of meaning in our lives. It can lead to deeper awareness and understanding of our role in life, but it also can contribute to a deeper appreciation of how meaning in our lives is intimately bound up in our relationships with others and the greater whole. In the immortalized words of 15th-century English poet John Donne, "No man is an island entire of itself. Everyman is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." We are deeply connected, not just through our common intellectual heritage, but through deep emotional and spiritual bonds that seem part of the very fabric of our being.

Paradoxically, we enter more fully into this relationship by deepening our understanding of our selves, of the inner worlds which seem so much a part of us but yet so distant from the everydayness of our normal, waking lives. To connect with the whole, we need to know ourselves, who we are and what we are about. Our relationships with others are only as strong and deep as the relationship we have with ourselves. But such inner work does not suggest we ignore or minimize the outer world until such time that we have arrived at self-knowledge. The path of understanding to the inner world leads through the outer world. The work of the soul is intimately bound up with our being in and of this world, not secluded and apart from it. It is an active life that is interlaced with contemplation and discernment.

RECLAIMING THE SPIRITUAL IN TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

I want to address some possible objections to this way of thinking about education and teaching and learning within higher and adult education. Some might argue that such a perspective has no place in these educational contexts; that the view being offered here is highly personal, private, and best kept out of the classroom; that this perspective advocates a spiritual and even religious dimension to education. To my way of thinking, learning and making sense of what we are studying and our lives involves the personal. How can it not involve the person? Unless we suggest that learning is this process that is somehow strangely removed from anything that means anything to us or that matters, it is going to involve the person's life experiences in the sense-making process. We will tread a fine line here, that is for sure, and as the argument develops, we will want to talk about this line further.

I am not advocating psychotherapy for the classroom, nor am I advocating that we adopt a religious view of learning. I believe learning involves the sacred and thus involves the spiritual. The spiritual represents a kind of backdrop, a matrix or a context in which virtually all of our life plays out. In developing the views of teaching and learning that I do here, I am simply acknowledging its presence and significance in our lives. I am not suggesting or advocating a particular religious perspective. My work is informed by my own experiences of faith and religion, my own struggles with the divine. This is the stuff of spirituality. I consider the act of learning to be an inherently spiritual act, at least in potential. It borders on the sacred, flirts with it, invites in the sacred, if we allow it.

What I am not advocating within these pages is the adoption of special religious or spiritual practices, such as breathing techniques, rituals that are not part of our regular classroom practices, or the use of cultural icons that have little or no connection with the focus of our study. Our focus is the text and our relationship with it. That relationship is spiritual enough, sacred and mysterious enough. It carries with it its own ritual, symbolism, imagery, and wonder. Out of this relationship somehow merges meaning of a sort, a meandering wave of sense making that can permeate much of our being. How does the word become human? How does the word come to dwell among us? What is the relationship of the word to the image (Shlain, 1998)? For me, the notion of "word" extends far beyond is religious connotation here. How do the words of the text, of what we read, hear, see or experience become part of who we are, lend meaning to our lives, illuminate those aspects of our lives shrouded in darkness or mystery? Clearly, it is more than memory, more than remembering what we read, see, hear, or experience. The process of learning represents the process of the word becoming an integral part of our being. And when this happens, it has the potential to transform our sense of self and our being in the world.

We want to acknowledge the deep meaning-making processes that are at the core of learning, while recognizing that this process will touch on, bump up against some boundaries that we do not want to cross. I take seriously the text. We have an obligation to honor its presence in our lives. We do so by recognizing its role in helping us deepen our understanding of our being in the world.

REFRAMING THE MEANING OF
MEANING MAKING IN ADULT LEARNING

To unpack this view of teaching and learning will require some effort, clarity, focus, energy, and commitment. I am suggesting here a way of thinking about teaching and learning that incorporates a holistic sense of the person. This means that to fully understand the process of adult learning and to be able to effectively facilitate it, we must explore the various dimensions that make up this holistic view. Adults engage in many different kinds of learning experiences, some of them more meaningful than others. Virtually all learning involves the process of meaning making in some form. In midsummer 2005, I attended a traffic safety school program. My participation in this program was voluntary to the extent that I wanted to avoid points on my record, but it certainly was not something I would

have otherwise chosen to attend. Sitting in a room for 4 hours with 20 other persons, all of whom were young enough to be my adult children, I struggled to make sense of my presence there. We were told stories about humans' struggle to live with a "code," about the dangers of speed, of tailgating, of driving while under the influence. We were shown movie clips and completed brief written exercises to help illustrate some of the points the instructor was making. No matter how one looked at this situation, it possessed all the hallmarks of a typical and quite traditional setting of teaching and learning.

What was the nature of my learning? What did I learn? And what did what I learned mean to me? I left this experience with a few additional facts I had not known before, images of car crashes that were not previously part of my consciousness, bits and pieces of a wide-ranging story of Western civilization somehow revolving around the concept of a code, a perspective of young adults that I had not previously experienced. And as an adult educator, I reflected on the teacher's design, approach, and interactions with the other learners present. And then there was this more ineffable aspect to the whole experience, this gnawing sense that seemed located somewhere in my gut, and best reflected in the questions "What am I doing here? How did I get here, and what does it all mean, if anything?" In reflecting on these questions, my mind would wander, the instructor's voice becoming a faint rumble in the recesses of my consciousness. Then something he or someone else said brought me back, and I looked at my watch, checking to see how many more minutes were left before this would be all over. Parts of this session were interesting and even a little enjoyable. Much of it felt tedious and boring. Some of what was presented moved me to reflect on my own experiences of driving, and some seemed completely disconnected with anything I have experienced or know myself to be.

I describe this experience here because it represents, I think, a fairly typical setting of adult learning, with all the pushes and pulls, the ebb and flow of learning in most settings of higher and adult education. It suggests, as have more formal studies of such settings, that the process of learning is multifaceted and complex. What is derived from such experiences reflects a whole host of factors, including the nature of the instructor, fellow participants, the physical setting itself, the content covered, the instructional methods used to convey this content, and perhaps most important the self of the learner (Pratt & Associates, 1998). The meaning derived from such experiences is bound up with all of these factors. We can say that I found some of this experience to be personally meaningful and relevant to me. This part of the experience seemed to hit home, dwelt in memory and in consciousness, rattling around a bit and causing further thinking and reflecting on experience. A large part of the information shared in this experience did not find a home in my being or engage me, and it passed by me like pedestrians on a busy city sidewalk. Some things I could briefly remember, perhaps more for the oddity of the information than anything the information spoke to me about. For the most part, I consider this dimension of the experience as not personally relevant or meaningful.

My focus, however, is on those aspects of our learning that we find personally meaningful. Many of these experiences will serve to further elaborate and deepen our understanding of who we are and our relationship with others and the world. Merriam and Clark (1992) referred to this aspect of learning as a process through which we add meaning to the structures and stories that we already have. For example, in my experience with the traffic safety school, because of my interest in teaching and learning, I observed and reflected on the teaching used in this course, the nature of the students, and the patterns of interactions and relationships that developed over the course of the 4 hours. The teacher's use of the concept of "the code" interested me, and I thought about how he was using this idea as he led us on a brief excursion through the history of Western civilization. Although I did not find much in the actual content of the course very meaningful, I was intrigued with its pedagogical aspects and I found them personally meaningful. They seemed to further support and elaborate tentative assumptions and conclusions I already held regarding much that passes for adult education.

Learning experiences that we find personally meaningful, however, may challenge at a deep and fundamental level our existing ways of thinking, believing, or feeling. Such experiences render present structures of meaning problematic, as if what we have previously known or held to be true is now hopelessly irrelevant and even wrongheaded. These experiences foster radical shifts in one's consciousness, in one's ways of being. Although they often manifest themselves in the assumptions and beliefs we hold, these kinds of personally relevant learning experiences are also deeply emotional, evoking powerful feelings, such as fear, grief, loss, regret, and anger, but also sometimes joy, wonder, and awe. At times, these experiences may leave us feeling deeply moved or shaken to our core. We are left with the feeling that life will not be as it was before, that this experience has created a sense that we cannot go back to the way we were before the experience.

At times, these kinds of learning experiences may reveal this kind of "burning bush" quality (Dirkx, 2001) or, as Mezirow herein describes, "epochal." They are dramatic, profound, and deeply moving, representing what Mezirow (1991) referred to as a "disorienting dilemma." We are obviously affected by such experiences, thrown off of our normal stride through life. They offer us an opportunity to reflect on and reexamine aspects of our lives that we may not have thought about for many years, if ever. That certain, personally meaningful learning experiences can be disorienting in this way seems clear. At some point in our lives, I suspect most of us have experienced such disorienting dilemmas. We may not have accepted the invitation implicit in such experiences to engage in a deeper form of learning about ourselves or our world, but it seems apparent that these experiences are not reserved for an elite few. Regardless of whether we accept and embrace the invitation or turn away from it and ignore its messages, we know we have been through something important and potentially quite profound in our lives.

Although such experiences are obviously of interest to me, I am more concerned here with the everydayness of our lives, of finding ourselves in a kind of traffic safety school experience and listening to the much more subtle messages that such learning experiences have to offer. I am, in the words of Thomas Moore

(1996), interested in the "enchantment of everyday life" through adult learning or, in the words of Krishnamurti (1994), "the self that we all know, the self of every-day movement" (p. 1). How might we begin to understand what is involved in developing a relationship with the self-in-the-world that begins to see this everyday world as an enchanted place, a place of wonder, mystery, and awe? It is the every-dayness of our lives that provides the canvas on which we create, each moment of each day, the forms and structures of meaning that make up who we are and what it means to us to be in and of the world. This everyday world serves as a mirror that reflects back to us our deepest wishes, longings, desires, fears, hopes, dreams, and anxieties. These kinds of learning experiences result in less clear or dramatic consequences or consequences that may not be immediately apparent. Yet even the most seemingly mundane kinds of learning experiences can offer an opportunity to feel deeply engaged and drawn into powerful experiences that fully capture their intellectual and emotional attention.

Both kinds of experiences, then, are personally meaningful, and both seem to go beyond that which is merely additive to the forms of meaning that we already hold about ourselves and the world. Yet there does seem to be a difference here. I want to stay first with experiences that are personally meaningful, deeply mean-ingful. I want to elaborate what these look like, feel like from the inside, and from the point of view of the educator. So the vision of transformative learning that I seem to be moving toward here involves, at the core, learning experiences that are deeply and personally meaningful.

The difficulty here is that at times, we are talking about the outcomes or con-sequences of learning and at times about the process. When we are in it, how would we know a personally meaningful, nontransformative experience from one that is transformative? They would both be deeply engaging, moving, profound. It is only as an outcome that we might realize that the experience was, for us, transformative. Such experiences have come to be called transformative learning experiences and are usually associated with profound change in one's cognitive, emotional, or spiritual way of being.

Jack Mezirow

I have read your thoughts on transformative learning with much interest. It is an excellent summary of an elusive but obviously significant dimension of trans-formative learning.

Your conclusion, "It is only as an outcome that we might realize that the experi-ence was, for us, transformative," seems to me particularly important for relating our respective viewpoints. My view is that the outcome must also involve a ratio-nal process of critically assessing one's epistemic assumptions as a critical dimen-sion of the process involved in transformative learning. I believe that it is this process, within awareness, that saves transformative learning from becoming re-duced to a faith, prejudice, vision, or desire.

I tend to agree with many educators, like Vygotsky, who believe that the development of consciousness, awareness, and control of one's thoughts is the ultimate aim of education (as cited in Gannaway, 1994). Joseph Weiss (1987) noted the importance of a frame of reference:

> Because people's beliefs about themselves and their world inevitably are based on the inferences they make from their own special experiences, each person's beliefs are different and each person can be said to live in a different reality. Just as two analysts with different theories perceive the same patient behavior in different ways, so do two persons with different beliefs perceive their interpersonal world and even their material worlds in different ways.
>
> People's beliefs about reality and morality, which to a large extent are acquired nonconsciously, are central to their mental life. The beliefs guide them in the tasks of adaptation and self-preservation. It is in accordance with their beliefs about themselves and their interpersonal world that they organize their perceptions about themselves and others and shape their behaviors, affects, and moods and evolve their personalities. (p. 429)

We can agree that significant learning outside awareness may be accessed, as you describe, by bringing it into awareness. Perhaps we can also agree that the full process of transformative learning includes both this mode of learning as you have described it and, once this dimension of learning is brought into awareness, the transformative action may be understood to feature a rational process involving critical reflection of epistemic assumptions as a basis for transforming a frame of reference. I do believe that any insightful theory of transformative learning in adult education should include both dimensions of the learning process.

John M. Dirkx

I think you and I would both agree that one of the outcomes of transformative learning is a fundamental change in what you refer to as a *frame of reference*. Furthermore, I would also agree that transforming our frames of reference involves both rational and extrarational processes. In the perspective I described, the unconscious is recognized as a powerful source of creative and potentially constructive forces within our lives (as well as potentially quite destructive forces!). These unconscious dynamics are expressed symbolically, rather than literally, in our dreams, fantasies, and the ways in which we invest and distribute our psychic energy (Jung, 1965). From a Jungian perspective, these unconscious energies reflect the psyche's need for differentiation and individuation. That is, they represent the language of the self and its journey toward wholeness. They are the source and driving force for fundamental transformation within our lives.

Individuation, therefore, is a naturally occurring process. The psyche seeks expression in the world and our lives. Whether we consciously participate in this process or not reflects the degree to which this process will be transformative, in the sense to which you and I refer. Much of the imaginal method that I have de-

scribed here and elsewhere (Dirkx, 1997, 2000, 2001) reflects conscious attention to these energies and their meaning to us. Without question, the ego and conscious awareness have critical roles to play in our abilities to discern the meaning of the messages arising within the unconscious.

Therefore, I think we would agree that conscious ego awareness is a necessary condition for transformative learning. I still see important differences, however, in how we are thinking about that which transforms and the methods used to help foster that process. Here I don't mean to argue that one perspective is better or more "right" than another. Rather, I want to stress that the kinds of transformative learning we are talking about might be different and that it may be important in the scholarship of transformative learning to preserve these differences.

First, let me address that which transforms. In your work, Jack, you place considerable emphasis on the ways in which our beliefs and assumptions shape and influence our perspectives, actions, and being in the world (Mezirow, 1991, 2000). As I understand your work, these beliefs and assumptions essentially constitute the meaning structures or frames of reference which, through critical reflection, can potentially be transformed. As your quotation from Weiss (1987) suggests, we derive these beliefs largely from unconscious inferences that we make from our experiences in and with the world.

These sets of beliefs, however, that make up our frames of reference vary in the extent to which they represent emotionally charged clusters of relational experiences. We might imagine, for instance, an adult learner who exhibits beliefs and assumptions about work that reflect the time-conscious and efficiency-oriented values of much of American culture. This frame of reference was acquired, as Weiss (1987) suggested, largely through unconscious experiences in her family and in her social contexts that reinforced habits and behaviors that were consistent with this cultural frame. An immersion experience in another culture, however, in which there is a much more "laid-back" understanding of and relationship to time, might cause her to think more deeply about these assumptions. Assuming she reflects on the range of epistemic and sociocultural assumptions that made up her perspective, the experience may result in a shift in a frame of reference. Although she may not change her own use of time, she may recognize that how others use their time may reflect a fundamentally different orientation to time, rather than character flaws such as being lazy, selfish, or inconsiderate.

In another learner, however, the experience of time may have become associated, earlier in his life, with powerful, emotional experiences with arbitrary and authoritarian uses of power. For him, beliefs and assumptions about time seem to symbolically represent feelings and affect more associated with this earlier relational experience than with the acquisition or internalization of a particular set of beliefs about the use of time. On a cross-cultural immersion experience in a Latin American country, he discovers belief systems compatible with his own and communities in which the members seem much more supportive and caring of one another. He realizes that this is the way we all should live and, on return to the United States 5 years later, experiences a *disorienting dilemma* in relation to time. He finds himself even more angry with what seems like a relentless obsession with

efficiency and the productive use of time. He increasingly withdraws from society, seeking out like-minded individuals and social contexts that are supportive of his "enlightened" state of being.

In the first scenario, the beliefs brought into question do not seem to hold the emotional charge that are present in the second case. In some instances, then, an experience of a disorienting dilemma might not result primarily from the beliefs and assumptions we hold but from an autonomous core of ideas operating within the psyche that are only loosely connected, if at all, to the literal manifestation of the issue (in this case beliefs about time). It is apparent that some charged cluster of relational experiences, below the level of conscious awareness, animates certain frames of reference, as in the second scenario (Hillman, 1975; Jung, 1965; Moore, 1996). Here, the literal, manifest frame of reference seems to have little to do with the deeper, unconscious meaning that is being attributed to the experience. In this scenario, the issue seems to be more about arbitrary use of authority and power than it does with the peculiar American beliefs about time.

In the first case, we seem to be talking about the transformation of a set of beliefs and assumptions that, under closer reflection and examination, seem to give way to more tolerant understanding of how we might differ with respect to our relationship with time. In the second case, however, the *form* is not really one's frame of reference about time at all. Rather, the frame is constituted by highly emotionally charged feelings about power and authority that remain largely unconscious and result in a withdrawal from society.

The second issue on which you and I, Jack, seem to differ is how we facilitate the transformation of the form, or framework. In the first scenario, critical reflection on assumptions seems fully appropriate. If we had the space, we might probe further the symbolic meanings reflected in this experience and what these meanings suggest about the self of the learner. For now, let's assume this experience is largely as it seems: a cross-cultural experience that created a disorienting dilemma for the learner that was resolved through a reworking of certain beliefs and assumptions, allowing her interactions with others to be more fluid and integrated. Viewing this learning and change as a rationally mediated process fostered through critical reflection seems quite helpful.

In the second example, however, the frame of reference is informed largely by unconscious psychic energy that is largely unaddressed through the critical reflection process. In fact, such analytic work might present even more difficulties with surfacing and discerning the presence of these dynamics and energies within one's being (Hillman, 1975). Becoming aware of the influence of this energy and working through the issues it represents requires not only conscious attention but a methodology that allows these powerful energies gradual expression within conscious awareness. We want to establish a relationship with these energies, and often the best way to do that is to develop an imaginal, dialogical relationship with them (Dirkx, 2001; Hillman, 1975; Moore, 1996). This process, as I have described, constitutes a form of reflection but it is less analytic than what you suggest in your descriptions of critical reflection. As one carries on this imaginal dialogue, through journaling or other practices, the unconscious energies bound up

with this energized cluster of relational experience become available to conscious awareness, and we are able to gradually incorporate it into our sense of who we are.

Much more needs to be said about this, of course, but I need to stop here. In summary, I consider our perspectives similar with respect to our mutual concern for transforming frames of reference that have either lost their meaning or usefulness to us or have in some way become dysfunctional. We are both interested in fostering enhanced awareness and consciousness of one's being in the world. You primarily emphasize epistemic beliefs, whereas I focus on unconscious emotional energies that seem to animate aspects of our perceptions of the world. You advocate a critically reflective approach to surfacing, analyzing, and potentially transforming epistemic belief structures. I suggest an imaginal approach to connecting and developing a conscious relationship with emotionally charged aspects of experience that remain unconscious and unavailable to everyday awareness. I also agree that we need both perspectives to deepen our understanding of this deep form of change and to fully incorporate these ways of learning into a transformative education. In the final analysis, I suggest we are seeking an integration of mind and soul.

Patricia Cranton

I was honored to have the opportunity to facilitate the conversation between Jack Mezirow and John Dirkx at the Sixth International Transformative Learning Conference and am again honored to be able to facilitate this discussion. In the early 1990s, with the publication of Jack Mezirow's (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, my view of adult education theory and practice was changed deeply. In my earlier writings on transformative learning theory, I followed Mezirow's work closely and added my view that the process of transformation may vary depending on people's learning styles or personality preferences. A few years after that, I became equally intrigued with John Dirkx's writings, initially through his contribution to a *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* volume I edited (Dirkx, 1997) and later through many of his other writings. In spite of the critiques of Mezirow's work for being too rational and not incorporating more imaginative and affective dimensions, I always thought that the two approaches were complementary rather than contradictory. I have tried to reflect this in my more recent writing.

I am pleased to see in this dialogue that both John Dirkx and Jack Mezirow share this perspective as well. Dirkx is not denying the existence of a rational process of transformative learning within awareness; he is simply more interested in understanding the subjective world and the shadowy inner world that has such power in leading us to deep shifts in how we see ourselves and the outer world. Mezirow acknowledges the significance of this dimension of transformative learning, adding only that the outcome must involve a critical assessment of assumptions to ensure that it is not based on faith, prejudice, vision, or desire.
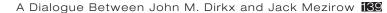
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