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## Reclaiming the emancipatory potential of adult education: Honneth's critical theory and the struggle for recognition

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### Abstract

*Mezirow's theory of transformative learning built on the learning experiences of non-traditional adult students returning to education and on the critical theory of Habermas, more recently progressed by Honneth. This paper links transformation theory with the work of Honneth who in recent works advances ideas about identity development and freedom that allow us update gaps in transformation theory – that it has an inadequate understanding of the social dimension of learning. A new understanding of 'disorienting dilemma' as a struggle for recognition is suggested. This paper expands our understanding of the emancipatory intent of transformative learning. EU funded empirical research supports this new iteration of the adult learning theory. Implications are drawn for teaching non-traditional students in adult and higher education.*

**Keywords:** transformative learning; Honneth; recognition; disorienting dilemma

### Introduction

Transformation theory is built on humanistic and constructivist assumptions that focus on the individual as a unit of analysis (Cranton & Taylor, 2012) and on assumptions from critical theory (especially Habermas) that focus on the social as a unit of analysis (Brookfield, 2012). Mezirow affirms a disconnection when he distinguishes subjective from objective reframing of meaning structures (2000). More unified theoretical understandings of transformative learning see learners engaging in both individual and social transformations that complement each other (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Attempts have been made to address these issues (Fleming, 2002; 2014) and as a new generation of critical theorists emerges it is important to clarify the links between critical theory and adult education. Honneth will provide a useful set of ideas to better understand adult education.

## Who is Axel Honneth?

Axel Honneth, a former student of Habermas, is Director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research and Professor of Humanities at Columbia University. He sets out to refocus critical theory by seeing distortions in communication (Habermas, 1987) as forms of disrespect. He expands the insight that human development can only be achieved through being acknowledged by others. The communicative turn of Habermas (1987) becomes the recognition turn of Honneth (1995). Indignations, guilt and shame drive social struggles for recognition and social freedom (2014) and he continues the critique that 'modern capitalist societies produce social practices, attitudes, or personality structures that result in a pathological distortion of our capacities for reason' (Honneth, 2009, p. vii).

The task of his critical theory is to identify experiences in society that contain 'system-exploding energies and motivations' in pursuit of freedom and justice (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 242). He offers 'a link between the social causes of widespread feelings of injustice and the normative objectives of emancipatory movements' (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p.113). Honneth re-writes critical theory so that instead of distorted communication damaged recognition is the pathology to be overcome.

Honneth reworks Mead and Winnicott and links individual struggles to be recognized by significant others with self-realization only achieved through interpersonal relations. In line with Habermas:

Individuation is pictured not as self-realization of the independently acting subject carried out in isolation and freedom but in a linguistically mediated process of socialization and the simultaneous constitution of life-history that is conscious of itself...Individuality forms itself in relations of intersubjective acknowledgement and intersubjectively mediated self-understanding. (Habermas, 1992, pp. 152-153)

Only by taking the perspective of others towards oneself can one construct a sense of self, with beliefs, desires, values and needs. These perspectives of others are shaped by culture, life history and life-narratives and we grow by internalising these. Later as adults we are capable of being reflexive about inherited values; evaluate and critique them; decide on their adequacy for the new generation and alter them in the light of this reflection. This is what Mezirow (1991) describes as transformative learning.

Distortions in identity are the motivation for struggle and social conflict (I will suggest that this is a disorienting dilemma) and this moves the debate about emancipation away from the highly cognitive and rational approach of Habermas toward an alternative theory of intersubjectivity. This has the potential to resolve the transformation theory disconnect concerning whether learning is an individual or social phenomenon. Transformative learning becomes *both* personal and social (Fleming, 2014). This is reminiscent of what Freire (1972) means when he critiques the philosophers' preoccupation with subject/object and reconfigures relationships between teaching/learning and thinking/action in *praxis*.

## Honneth and recognition

Honneth understands the intersubjectivity between parent and child as a form of socialisation that assists the development of individual identity through the reciprocal recognition of 'each other ... as living emotionally needy beings' (Honneth, 1995, p. 18). Self-realization can only be achieved through interpersonal relationships (Honneth,

1995) that are a precondition for participation in public life, political will formation and democracy. Honneth re-imagines the project of critical theory arguing that:

The reproduction of social life is governed by the imperative of mutual recognition, because one can develop a practical relation-to-self only when one has learned to view oneself, from the normative perspective of one's partners in interaction, as their social addressee. (Honneth, 1995, p. 92)

Transformative learning and communicative action involve more than following linguistic rules of discourse (Habermas, 1987) and involve mutuality and intersubjectivity (Honneth, 1995). The antidote to being too individualistic lies in the critical theory foundations of transformation theory as articulated by Habermas and Honneth. The struggle for recognition, based on experiences of disrespect and the need for self-esteem, explains *social* development:

It is by the way of the morally motivated struggles of social groups their collective attempt to establish, institutionally and culturally, expanded forms of recognition—that the normatively directional change of societies proceeds. (Honneth, 1995, p. 92)

Social change is driven by inadequate forms of recognition and internal (psychic) conflict leads to social change. In this way we see how the social and personal are connected.

### Honneth on recognition

Honneth argues that in modern society there are three levels of recognition 'and an intersubjective struggle mediates between each of these levels, a struggle that subjects conduct in order to have their identity claims confirmed' (Honneth, 1997, p. 21).

The first of the three forms of relating is self-confidence established and developed in relationships of friendship and love. If one experiences love an ability to love is developed. Without a special relationship with another it is not possible to become aware of one's own uniqueness and achieve an identity. Adult relationships can also be infused with such acknowledgements and are developmental. This has implications for adult education. These are the preconditions for the formation of identity and also for involvement in a democratic society. If this essential ingredient of development is not available or a negative message about self-worth is received, the outcome is a missing piece in the personality that may find 'expression through negative emotional reactions of shame or anger, offence or contempt' (Honneth, 1995, p. 257).

The second form of relating to self is self-respect, when a person in a community of rights is recognised as a legally mature person. Legal rights institutionalise the acknowledgements that each owes to another as an autonomous person. Respect is shown to others by relating toward them as having rights—without rights there is no respect (Honneth, 1995).

The third form of recognition happens through work and this experience of acknowledgement leads to self-esteem. Relationships of solidarity at work and other collaborative activities enhance self-esteem. Individuals become 'recognised as a person whose capabilities are of constitutive value to a concrete community' (Honneth, 1997, p. 20). People with high self-esteem will reciprocate a mutual acknowledgement of other's contribution to the community (Honneth, 1995).

It is not surprising that there are three corresponding forms of disrespect (Honneth, 1995). If people are denied rights their self-respect may suffer and there is a 'mal-distribution of recognition' that damages self-respect (Huttunen, 2007, p. 428). Rape and torture are examples of misrecognition that undermine self-confidence (Honneth, 1995). Such violations are injustices and cause additional damage because individuals are also injured with regard to the positive understanding they acquired of themselves intersubjectively. 'Disrespect refers to the specific vulnerabilities of humans resulting from the internal interdependence of individualisation and recognition' (Honneth, 1995, p. 131).

The second form of recognition points to misrecognitions from violations of rights framed in laws. It is more than a feeling of being excluded from a benefit (e.g. education or health care because of one's gender) but is also a violation of the treatment to which one has good reason to expect as a right, e.g. the right to be protected against discriminations on the basis of race, gender, disability, etcetera.

The third form of disrespect points to cultural norms that ignore or denigrate ways of life. Abuse, insults and ignoring people as well as forms of 'put down' are not only injustices but undermine identity (Honneth, 1995). Cultures, in spite of anti-discrimination measures and laws, can have deeply embedded prejudices.

We begin to see how in critical theory the social and personal are connected. Social change is driven by inadequate forms of recognition and the struggle for recognition becomes a form of social praxis. The theory of recognition establishes a link between the social causes of experiences of injustice and the motivation for emancipatory movements (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). The political is personal. This is an attempt to reconfigure the age old sociological debate involving structure and agency.

### The freedom turn of Honneth

Honneth goes beyond Habermas by seeking a broader vision of democracy involving not only the political sphere but emancipated democratic families and socialised markets and work places (Honneth, 2014). The realisations of freedom in one of these areas depends on the realisation in others so that democratic citizens, emancipated families and ethical markets 'mutually influence each other, because the properties of one cannot be realised without the other two' (Honneth, 2014, p. 331). From the first sentence of *Freedom's Right* Honneth (2014) states that freedom is the key value of modern life: 'Of all the ethical values prevailing and competing for dominance in modern society, only one has been capable of leaving a truly lasting impression on our institutional order: freedom...' (p. 15).

Freedom involves being in a place where social life can be better and it involves the ability to realise one's own desires, intentions and values in the social environment of roles and obligations. Individual and social freedom are connected, not in some vague or superficial way but essentially. Markets, interpersonal relationships and the spaces of public politics are best understood as places of potential social freedom. Work places, friendships, family, and work, are all justified only if they promote, support and bring about a free society for all. Critical theory for Honneth is built on social freedom. Education and the right to education must be part of the emancipatory project.

In *Freedom's Right* Honneth (2014) reorients critical theory to focus on freedom rather than on recognition. In order to realise social freedom individuals must be able to view each other's freedom as a condition for their own and the members of society are free to the extent they initiate and enhance mutual recognition. Family, friendships and

interpersonal relationships all contribute to social freedom—our inner nature is set free by mutual acknowledgements. Honneth is also critical of legal, political and other spheres (including work) that do not support values that are achievable through interpersonal relations. So many adults' experiences of education (schooling) do not support freedom. Social freedom is also connected to the sphere of markets with its consumer rights; regulations about what can be sold and how, about pricing, wages, and about fairness in business transactions. Honneth outlines a series of changes in society that have contributed to disconnecting the markets from social freedom. Neoliberalism is a form of social mis-development and education informed by neo-liberal imperatives is anti-freedom. The most important sphere of social freedom is what he calls the 'We' of democratic will formation. His theory of democracy involves democratic interactions that enable citizens to make their lives and conditions better through a process of discursive will formation. Again, with reference to Habermas, the democratic state acts as an agent of the democratic public sphere. This suggests that learning (and teaching) for the development of the 'we' of democratic discourse is a vital task of adult education and a necessary one for transformative learning. Current and insurgent social movements in Barcelona, Athens, Wall Street infused with indignations are examples of the expanded 'we' that are, in Honneth's view, spheres of social freedom. Freedom is inherently social as it cannot be realised if one is not involved in the 'we' of democratic will formation where the same weight is afforded to contributions of all citizens. In this scheme interpersonal relations, the markets, work and democratic relations (and in my view adult education) provide the social conditions needed to improve social and living conditions (Ibid.).

### **Empirical confirmations**

In an EU funded research project on Access and Retention of Non-traditional Learners in Higher Education (RANLHE, 2010) across seven countries the themes of respect, confidence and self-esteem emerge from the interviews (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b).

In the Ireland longitudinal study (over 3 years) 125 qualitative interviews were conducted in three higher education institutions – an elite university, a university that provides access to non-traditional adult students and an Institute of Technology. The researchers were interested in narrative research with an interest in recording the lived experiences of non-traditional adult students (many of whom made their access route through the adult education system). The narrative approach was already an accepted methodology clearly articulated by colleagues on the research team. Peter Alheit (Göttingen) and Linden West (Canterbury) took critical theory and psychoanalytic approaches (West, Alheit, Andersen & Merrill, 2007) to collecting and analysing narrative data.

The research attempted to make findings that would impact on the lives of students and others in adult and higher education (Bauman, 2014). Critical theory attempts to show how personal experiences are inextricably linked with public issues. The task of the sociological imagination, according to Bauman, is 'to show how personal life and individual biography is intimately connected with historical events and structural processes' and the 'sociological imagination makes the personal political' (Bauman, pp. 3f).

The researchers relied on grounded theory to analyse data (Charmaz, 2006). In the first phase of research we employed two main 'sensitising concepts'—'habitus', (Bourdieu, 1984) and 'transitional space' (West et al., 2007). Our conception of

transitional space was based on a number of complementary psychosocial theories (most notably Bowlby and Winnicott). One of the most consistent findings was the importance given by students to the university as a space in which aspects of their identity were explored, renegotiated and sometimes transformed. Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus deployed alongside his theorisation of social, symbolic, cultural and economic capitals and the way they operate in specific fields also offered tools for understanding the enduring impact of social inequality on students' lives. This helped to illuminate how learners stories, especially the narratives about learner identity and educational expectations, were clearly shaped and informed by a lived experience of social power.

The data led to the emergence of intersubjective recognition as a key concept central in students' accounts of their motivation for applying to college and their determination 'to stay the course.' The interviewee's decision to go to college was informed by a desire for recognition that was rooted in a perceived lack or undeveloped capability often rooted in the experience of disrespect at school or work. Not only did they hold education and teachers in high esteem, they wanted to be held in high esteem themselves and looked to education to do this. One student said: 'When you are working class, you look for esteem...we held teacher, priest ... in esteem... these are positions of recognition. I was probably looking for that'.

One woman (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014b) talked about her working class background and 'turbulent family life... I ... fell through the cracks ... in school'. Despite her successful career where she was 'respected' she decided 'I wanted to go back [to education] for my own self-esteem to try to see can I do this'. In university she flourished and as a consequence has a stronger sense of self-esteem, agency and autonomy. 'It is about acceptance and your worth being recognized. It was a chance to learn and to be on an equal footing with other people' (Fleming & Finnegan, 2014a, p. 151). Although each story is unique, this narrative is typical. It is underpinned by the logic of recognition and she uses confidence and respect as key terms. A middle-aged student told of a work supervisor who encouraged her to return to education by recognizing 'that she had something.' The support was experienced as recognition of her intelligence:

They were seeing something...I think my reaction to the books they gave me...I thought they were the mad ones. They could see me starting college, they told me this since. That's what they said anyway. You come across people who, no matter how stupid or unaware you are of your ability, they can see something and they point it out.

She repeated, 'they can see something' a number of times. Such stories tell of recognition that is developmental. They hint strongly that if education is to provide transformative experiences these moments need to be turned into pedagogical experiences of recognition—they are a pre-condition for transformative learning. Transformative learning and recognition rely on each other. This struggle for recognition acts as a disorienting dilemma. The disorienting dilemmas of the participants that triggered transformative learning were infused with struggles for recognition. The struggles for recognition were about moving away from unfulfilling jobs and lives that offered limited outlets for abilities, and with fixed ambitions. This adds to the understanding of disorienting dilemmas that form part of the transformative learning dynamic (Mezirow, 2000).

Another student returned to the subject of schooling quite often in the interviews. She did not feel supported or encouraged in school by teachers. She internalised the idea that she *was stupid*. Although, she suspected that this was not completely true it became

an important part of her internal conversation about herself as a learner and a person. She had a sense that this was not fair. Her story illustrates how institutions, the interventions of individual teachers and structural inequalities play out in learning biographies. She says the school favoured middle class students and remembers a teacher saying to her mother:

‘It doesn’t matter if she doesn’t pass the class she is just going to end up in a job anyway. She’ll never get to college’... He was a teacher and he was intelligent and powerful. He was telling my mum; ‘she is never going to progress to something else’. [She began to think] maybe that is who I am. I am not meant to be in college. So from that moment on I didn’t apply myself.

Her parents had left school young to go to work and he did not have the opportunity to develop basic educational skills. They were intellectually curious but were *held back* by circumstances - the demands of rearing a family and the gendered expectations of their era. As a consequence: ‘My mum and dad didn’t know how to fill out a CAO form [the Irish university application form] and I had no idea how to do it. I didn’t even know what that meant’.

As a result of institutional misrecognition linked to class expectations she (and many others) left school unsure of her options and a sense of being an under achiever. This student suspected that she had capabilities that were not being tapped but nonetheless the dominant story remained that she was *stupid*. She eventually got work in a large organization and was *respected* at work but was still concerned about her capability as a learner and the absence of a degree held her back. She wanted work that matched her deeper concerns and interests. She decided: ‘I wanted to go back [to education] for my own self-esteem to try to see can I do this’

This student is emphatic that her decision to go to adult education and later to university was not motivated by a desire for more money afterwards, but greater choice in work and a job that was closer to her own interests and desires. She links going to college with self-esteem, proving her worth and undoing the impact of disrespect and low expectations. A sense of how she construes her choices can be gathered from the following exchange. This student was discussing her future plans after her course and says ‘I would love the idea of helping and teaching.’

Because I wasn’t helped. No one recognized any potential in me. You see these inspirational movies. Like a basketball coach comes in and inspires the kids to become scholars. I always had aspirations to do well, but at the time my family life wasn’t built in such a way that I was getting that from my home life. My mom and dad weren’t able for various reasons to support me in that way. But I would have loved a teacher or someone to recognize potential in me. To say this person is not performing, but it is not because they are stupid. It is not because they can’t do it. But no one recognized the potential ever. I have aspirations of helping in such a way of recognizing in others the reasons they are not achieving.... That I would be someone who would recognize and realize there is a different way.

It is clear that this student’s decision to come to college was informed by a desire for recognition of her capability as a human being and developing her abilities in a way that can contribute to the flourishing of others. She had carried a sense of an undeveloped capability linked to the experience of disrespect and misrecognition in school and work. The structural inequalities of gender and class in families, institutions and society play a significant part in the formation of learner identity. Renegotiating her learner identity in college has been a meaningful process which is underpinned by the logic of



intersubjective recognition as it relates to both her private and public self. It indicates that this is transformative learning.

Such stories tell of moments of recognition that are profoundly developmental. But they are always, it seems, also unpredictable as one cannot tell in advance (or at the time) which moment or event of recognition will trigger the 'experience of being recognised' as Honneth (1995, p. 128) expresses it. In turn the struggle for recognition opens the possibility and potential for transformative learning.

## Critique of Honneth

Nancy Fraser, the most widely known critique of recognition theory, argues that the theory neglects unjustifiable and unequal access to material resources (Fraser & Honneth, 2003). Her critique is substantial but in the process of debate with Honneth they add significantly to the understanding of Honneth's contribution and this allows him rethink these important questions. He claims that the struggle for recognition lies behind all major social conflicts and that these conflicts over distribution of goods and wealth are (contrary to Fraser) 'locked into the struggle for recognition' (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 54). The core of these debates is about whether recognition is a good enough construct for understanding economic relations and the nature of capitalism today. Both agree that the project of critical theory involves social justice. Fraser's response is that social struggles are better understood from a dual perspective, which includes both recognition and distributive elements. Honneth remains convinced that:

Critical theory, under present conditions, does better to orient itself by the categorical framework of a sufficiently differentiated theory of recognition, since this establishes a link between the social causes of wide-spread feelings of injustice and the normative objectives of emancipatory movements. (Fraser & Honneth 2003, p. 113)

Honneth responds to Fraser in two ways. Firstly, to reframe the undoubted importance of intersubjectivity in social reproduction and development. This is in line with traditional critical theory. Secondly, it contributes a welcome and overdue rethink of the importance of debates between social and psychological theories. In his rethinking of Hegel, G H Mead, Winnicott and Habermas the argument is rethought for a new era as to how the social and the personal may be kept in intimate connection. As in much of critical theory the best solutions are not to fix the priority given to structure or agency but to see how they are connected in dialectical ways.

Lois McNay's critique, *Against Recognition* (2008) (while not against recognition) is critical of the way Honneth's priority for the relational understanding of self-formation and social conflict prevents more systemic understandings of power to emerge. She presents Bourdieu's account of embodied habitus to analyse gendered power and claims this is a better understanding of power than Honneth's take on Winnicott. The face to face understanding of how gender is reproduced does not allow a structured understanding of how gender is socially reproduced in society.

Others (Petherbridge, 2013) have joined in this debate about whether intersubjectivity or structural issues provide a better basis for understanding social and individual reproduction. It is clear that these disagreements have not been resolved. However, Honneth is not immune to the impact of power through social class or gender. One way of offering at least a compromised position in the contested discourse is to acknowledge that individuals may be in the powerful grip of class, race and gendered relations and that there are also other powerful environments that contribute

significantly to the process of self-formation and these cannot be reduced to class, gender and race in any uncomplicated way. But the incomplete and contested nature of these studies allows the disputes to remain unresolved. Rather than resolve these current disputes it is appropriate to note the unfinished nature of the sociological journey and the contested nature of knowledge. But more importantly, and in an ironic way, these disputes have contributed both to Honneth's project of elaboration and to the enhanced reception of his ideas in sociological communities.

Honneth's work attempts to make social issues such as poverty, unemployment, injustices, globalisation and abuses of power open to being understood in recognition terms. Unemployment is experienced as misrecognition – and this is a way of emphasising that Honneth's theory is not merely a psychology of internal processes but a thorough social psychology with the critical theory intent of understanding and changing the material conditions of the oppressed. The more recent work of Honneth (2014) is testament to his ability to reframe his work in response to such sustained and immanent critique.

## Implications and discussion

Honneth work has had little impact on education apart from a few (Murphy & Brown, 2012; Huttunen, 2007) and some work has been done on the connection with transformative learning (Fleming, 2014). Transformative learning theory has followed the communicative turn of Habermas and emphasised the pathology of distorted communication (Mezirow, 1991). I suggest that this learning theory might now follow the recognition turn of Honneth and identify the implications for transformation theory. Transformative learning is critical of presuppositions; aims to create discursive spaces in which the force of the better argument is the only force and in which all have full and equal rights to participate freely in democratic will-formation. Transformative learning requires critical reflection and now recognition becomes central to that learning process and to critical reflection.

### *Teaching adults and recognition*

In order to engage in the discourses associated with transformative learning we now assert that the formation of democratic discussions requires three forms of self-relating. We need caring and loving individuals (teachers) and these are produced through and by those with self-confidence. It requires recognition of the reciprocal nature of legal rights and, as one might anticipate, a person who possesses self-respect (the capacity to know one's own rights) is in a better position to recognize the rights of others. And thirdly, a democratic discursive society requires the reciprocal recognition provided by work and solidarity. Again, a person with self-esteem can better recognize the contributions of others. This so called 'recognition turn' of Honneth suggests strongly that the high rationality of the often critiqued version of transformative learning is 'softened' by this understanding of the recognition that underpins the democratic discourse of a learning environment. Teaching might usefully address the struggles for recognition as motivations for learning. This Honneth inspired emphasis on the interpersonal dimension of teaching and of learning and the key importance of recognition is important so that current preoccupations with the technologies of teaching and teaching as a technique can be balanced by emphasising the importance of mutual support, peer teaching and student-centered activities.

*The social dimension of transformation theory*

Without altering the importance of critical reflection for transformative learning there is now the possibility of reframing transformation theory so that rational discourse is seen as grounded firmly in an interpersonal process of support and recognition that builds self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. Mezirow (and Habermas) see democratic participation as an important means of self-development that produces individuals who are more tolerant of difference, sensitive to reciprocity and better able to engage in discourse (2000). It is important not to sink into a sentimental subjectivity here but build on this understanding; this is a precondition for rational discourse without losing rigor or the ambition to remain within the emancipatory agenda of critical theory. The emphasis on whether learning is individual or social can be re-configured in the same way Freire reconfigured subject/object, teacher/learner that is best expressed in his concept of *praxis* (1972).

The previously referred to individualism of Mezirow's theory is now reframed as a fundamentally intersubjective process of mutual respect and recognition. These relations of mutuality are preconditions for self-realization, critical reflection, engagement in democratic discourse and transformative learning. Recognition and emancipation are connected; recognition becomes the foundation on which emancipatory learning and social change are based.

The process of transformative learning commences with a 'disorienting dilemma' (Mezirow, 2000). In Mezirow's work this normally involves a disconnect between old inadequate frames of reference and the possibility offered by new ones. The dilemma for the learner is whether to stay with old ways of making meaning that have lost their ability to usefully guide understanding and action or search for new ones – reinforced by the RANLHE (2010) empirical findings. The struggle for recognition functions as a disorienting dilemma. It motivates the search for new meanings schemes and identities. Disorienting dilemmas for returning students involve whether to stay in the world circumscribed by old experiences of misrecognition or respond to the struggle to be recognized and acknowledged. This search for new meanings is found in social struggles, new social movements and in adult and higher education.

Another step in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) involves the recognition that one's problems are shared by others who have also negotiated similar change. Honneth sets individual problems in a wider social context and this confirms the Mezirow empirical finding that individual problems are shared and only understood properly when seen as such. The shared nature of individual problems and experiences is not just a useful step toward transformation but an essential aspect of knowing and of learning.

*Emancipation and adult learning*

The final implication of this study of Honneth involves the importance that freedom plays in his recent work. Transformative learning has always been grounded in critical theory with its priority for understanding society with an emancipatory intent, which is the aim of transformative learning. Social freedom becomes a well-founded aim of adult education. This enhances the emancipatory agenda of transformations so that adult education now become a learning project with the practical intent of increasing freedom, justice, care and equality in the spheres of family, law and work.

Teaching adults is a process of mutual recognition between teacher and learner. Teaching that is informed in this way has the potential to strengthen identity development. With the current emphasis on functional learning, competency and behavioural outcomes in education, and a neo-liberal inspired valorisation of the market

as the ultimate supplier of all needs, these ideas take seriously the contribution of intersubjectivity as important for teaching, learning and transformation and as an antidote to dominant models. The motivation to engage in learning becomes less economic, functional and instrumental and more communicative, social and potentially transformative and emancipatory. This is achieved not just by an emphasis on critical reflection but on the always presupposed imperative of recognition.

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