

Adult Education Quarterly

<http://aeq.sagepub.com>

A Critical Theory of Adult Learning and Education

Jack Mezirow

Adult Education Quarterly 1981; 32; 3

DOI: 10.1177/074171368103200101

The online version of this article can be found at:
<http://aeq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/32/1/3>

Published by:

 SAGE Publications

<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[American Association for Adult and Continuing Education](#)

Additional services and information for *Adult Education Quarterly* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://aeq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://aeq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

A CRITICAL THEORY OF ADULT LEARNING AND EDUCATION

JACK MEZIROW

ABSTRACT

Interpreting the ideas of Jurgen Habermas, the nature of three generic domains of adult learning is posited, each with its own interpretive categories, ways of determining which knowledge claims are warranted, methods of inquiry as well as its own learning goals, learning needs and modes of educational intervention. Perspective transformation is seen as one of the learning domains and the domain most uniquely adult. The nature and etiology of perspective transformation is elaborated with particular focus on the function of reification and of reflectivity. Implications of a critical theory for self-directed learning and adult education are explored. A Charter for Andragogy is suggested.

This article presents the beginnings of a critical theory of adult learning and education. There are three parts. In the first part the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas is presented as a learning theory positing three generic domains of adult learning, each with its own interpretative categories, ways of assessing knowledge claims, methods of inquiry and, by implication, each with its own distinctive learning modes and needs. The second part attempts to explain the least familiar of Habermas' domains of learning, "emancipatory action," by synthesizing and extending my earlier work on perspective transformation which is seen as the same concept. The nature and etiology of "meaning perspective" and perspective transformation in human development will be analyzed through the writings of social scientists. I draw upon our earlier studies of women in college re-entry programs because they represent the research base from which the process of perspective transformation was delineated and the source of the most familiar examples of this kind of learning in action. In the third part of the article, implications of this emerging critical theory for self-directed learning and for the education of adults will be explored.

Jurgen Habermas is widely considered as the most influential thinker in Germany over the past decade. As a philosopher and sociologist he has mastered and creatively articulated an extraordinary range of specialized literature in the social sciences, social theory and the history of ideas in the development of a comprehensive and provocative critical theory of knowledge and human interests. His roots are in the tradition of German thought from Kant to Marx, and he has been associated with the Frankfurt School of critical theorists which pioneered in the study of the relationship of the ideas of Marx and Freud.¹

THE DOMAINS OF ADULT LEARNING

Habermas differentiates three generic areas in which human interest generates knowledge. These areas are "knowledge constitutive" because they determine

JACK MEZIROW is Professor of Higher and Adult Education, Columbia University Teachers College, New York, New York.

categories relevant to what we interpret as knowledge. They also determine the mode of discovering knowledge and for establishing whether knowledge claims are warranted. Three distinct but interrelated learning domains are suggested by Habermas' three primary cognitive interests—the technical, the practical and the emancipatory. These interests are grounded in different aspects of social existence: work, interaction and power. Habermas suggests that differences in the very nature of these three interests mandate fundamentally different methodologies of systematic objective inquiry. By extension, each learning domain suggests to me a different mode of personal learning and different learning needs. These imply three different functions for adult education concerned with facilitating such learning. Consequently, I believe Habermas' work is seminal for understanding both learning and education.

The first of the three areas of cognitive interest, "work," refers broadly to the ways one controls and manipulates his or her environment. This involves "instrumental" action. Such action is based upon empirical knowledge and is governed by technical rules. Instrumental action always involves predictions about observable events—physical or social—which can prove correct or incorrect. Choices in the process involve strategies based upon this knowledge deduced from rules of a value system and from rules of investigation. These strategies may be correctly or incorrectly deduced. The criteria of *effective control* of reality direct what is or is not appropriate action. The strategy of choice depends upon correctly assessing alternatives.

Habermas contends that the form itself of this way of knowing necessitates the analysis of objects and events into dependent and independent variables and the identification of regularities among them. Hypotheses are confirmed through a system monitoring feedback. The empirical-analytic sciences have been developed expressly to assist us in understanding our technical interests, those relating to work. The very nature of our efforts to control and manipulate the environment has dictated a uniquely appropriate approach using hypothetical-deductive theories and permitting the deduction of empirical generalizations from lawlike hypotheses through controlled observation and experimentation.

The second area of cognitive interest, or learning domain, Habermas identifies as "practical." This area of practical interest involves interaction or "communicative action." Communicative action is a distinctly different way of knowing from the instrumental action through which one seeks to control and manipulate the environment. Communicative action

... is governed by binding *consensual* norms, which define reciprocal expectations about behavior and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects. Social norms are enforced through sanctions. Their meaning is objectified in ordinary language communication. While the validity of technical rules and strategies depend on that of empirically true or analytically correct propositions, the validity of social norms is grounded only in the intersubjectivity of the mutual understanding of intentions and secured by the general recognition of obligations. (11: 92)

The uniqueness of communicative action requires a set of categories for understanding it, as well as for description and explanation, which is different from that appropriate to instrumental action. This understanding and mode of inquiry has as its aim not technical control and manipulation but rather the clarification of conditions for communication and intersubjectivity. It is not the methods of empirical-analytic sciences which are appropriate to this task but systematic inquiry which seeks the understanding of meaning rather than to establish causality. Habermas refers to the "historical-hermeneutic" sciences. Hermeneutics refers to the science of interpretation and explanation.² It is derived from that branch of theology which, through textual analysis, defines the laws by which the meaning of the Scriptures has to be ascertained. Habermas describes the approach of the historical-hermeneutic sciences:

Here the meaning of validity of propositions is not constituted in the frame of reference of technical control. . . theories are not constructed deductively and experience is not organized with regard to the success of operations. Access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning, not observation. The verification of lawlike hypotheses in empirical-analytic sciences has its counterpart here in the interpretation of texts. Thus the rules of hermeneutics determine the possible meaning of the validity of statements in the cultural sciences. (10: 309)

The historical-hermeneutic disciplines differ from the empirical-analytic sciences in the "content" studied, methods of inquiry and criteria for assessing alternative interpretations. They include descriptive social science, history, aesthetics, legal, ethnographic, literary and other studies interpreting the meaning of communicative experience. In our study of women in re-entry programs, we used a hermeneutic approach to attempt to understand patterns of commonality in the process of perspective change from transcripts of our interviews.

The third area of cognitive interest, or learning domain, Habermas characterizes as "emancipatory." This involves an interest in self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of self-reflection, including interest in the way one's history and biography has expressed itself in the way one sees oneself, one's roles and social expectations. Emancipation is from libidinal, institutional or environmental forces which limit our options and rational control over our lives but have been taken for granted as beyond human control. Insights gained through critical self-awareness are emancipatory in the sense that at least one can recognize the correct reasons for his or her problems.

Habermas turns to the "critical social sciences" to find the mode of inquiry based epistemologically in emancipatory cognitive interest. Critical social sciences have the goal of critique. They attempt ". . . to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideological frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed" (10:310). Examples of critical science are psychoanalysis and the critique of ideology. An ideology is a belief system and attendant attitudes held as true and valid which shape a group's interpretation of reality and behavior and

are used to justify and legitimate actions. Critical theorists hold, with Marx, that one must become critically conscious of how an ideology reflects and distorts moral, social and political reality and what material and psychological factors influence and sustain the false consciousness which it represents—especially reified powers of domination.

The critical sciences “take into account that information about lawlike connections [which] sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those whom the laws are about.” As initial nonreflective consciousness is transformed, such laws can be seen as being inapplicable.

The methodological framework that determines the meaning of the validity of critical propositions of this category is established by the concept of self-reflection. The latter releases the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers. Self reflection is determined by an emancipatory cognitive interest. (10:310)

Dramatic personal and social change becomes possible by becoming aware of the way ideologies—sexual, racial, religious, educational, occupational, political, economic and technological—have created or contributed to our dependency on reified powers. However, Habermas follows Hegel and Marx in rejecting the notion that a transformed consciousness in a specific situation can be expected to automatically lead to a predictable form of action. The intent of education for emancipatory action—or what in the next section of this article I have described as perspective transformation—would be seen by Habermas as the providing of the learner with an accurate, in-depth understanding of his or her historical situation.

PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION

It is curious that the most distinctively adult domain of learning, that involving emancipatory action, is probably least familiar to adult educators. However, some readers will recognize the concept of emancipatory action as synonymous with “perspective transformation.” This mode of learning was inductively derived from a national study of women participating in college re-entry programs (16). Through extensive interviews, it became apparent that movement through the existential challenges of adulthood involves a process of negotiating an irregular succession of transformations in “meaning perspective.” This term refers to *the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience*. For many women studied, such psychocultural assumptions involved the traditional stereotypic view of the “proper” roles of women and the often strong feelings internalized in defense of these role expectations by women themselves.

Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process *of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings*. It is the learning process by which adults come to recognize their

culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them.

There are certain anomalies or disorienting dilemmas common to normal development in adulthood which may be best resolved only by becoming critically conscious of how and why our habits of perception, thought and action have distorted the way we have defined the problem and ourselves in relationship to it. The process involves what Freire (7) calls "problem posing," making problematic our taken-for-granted social roles and expectations and the habitual ways we act and feel in carrying them out. The resulting transformation in perspective or personal paradigm is what Freire refers to as "conscientization" and Habermas as emancipatory action. In asserting its claim as a major domain of adult learning, perspective transformation at the same time asserts its claim as a central function for adult education.

Our natural tendency to move toward new perspectives which appear to us more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience in attempting to resolve our disorienting dilemmas may be explained as a quest for meaning by which to better understand ourselves and to anticipate events. Carl Rogers has hypothesized a teleological explanation, "... a formative directional tendency in the universe which can be traced and observed in stellar space, in crystals, in microorganisms, in organic life, in human beings. This is an evolutionary tendency toward greater order, greater interrelatedness, greater complexity" (22:26). As we will see, there are both cultural and psychological contingencies which can restrain our natural movement to learn through perspective transformation.

From our research on re-entry women, the dynamics of perspective transformation appeared to include the following elements: (1) a disorienting dilemma; (2) self examination; (3) a critical assessment of personally internalized role assumptions and a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations; (4) relating one's discontent to similar experiences of others or to public issues—recognizing that one's problem is shared and not exclusively a private matter; (5) exploring options for new ways of acting; (6) building competence and self-confidence in new roles; (7) planning a course of action; (8) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans; (9) provisional efforts to try new roles and to assess feedback; and (10) a reintegration into society on the basis of conditions dictated by the new perspective.

The traumatic severity of the disorienting dilemma is clearly a factor in establishing the probability of a transformation. Under pressing external circumstances, such as death of a mate, a divorce or a family breadwinner becoming incapacitated, a perspective transformation is more likely to occur.

There appears to be two paths to perspective transformation: one is a sudden insight into the very structure of cultural and psychological assumptions which has limited or distorted one's understanding of self and one's relationships. The other is movement in the same direction that occurs by a series of transitions which

permit one to revise specific assumptions about oneself and others until the very structure of assumptions becomes transformed. This is perhaps a more common pattern of development. The role transitions themselves are only opportunities for the kind of self-reflection essential for a transformation. In such cases the anomalous situation creating a disorienting dilemma may be the result of a more evolutionary personal history in which circumstances, like the prospect of an empty nest, make a woman increasingly receptive to changing social norms regarding women's roles or internalized rigidities constraining her from becoming autonomous. There may be more women—and men too—familiar with Betty Friedan's "problem without a name" than they are with many more easily labelled existential dilemmas of adulthood.

Paulo Freire has introduced adult educators to "conscientization" as the process by which the Hegelian and Marxist concept of false consciousness becomes transcended in traditional societies through adult education.³ The learning process in conscientization is seen in a different social context in women's consciousness raising groups and in college re-entry programs. From our study of this same process in re-entry women, it became apparent that Freire does not give sufficient cognizance to or make explicit the stumbling blocks which intervene to make this transformation in perspective itself highly problematic.

Although one does not return to an old perspective once a transformation occurs, this passage involves a difficult negotiation and compromise, stalling, backsliding, self-deception and failure are exceedingly common. Habermas has clearly recognized this fact:

We are never in a position to know with absolute certainty that critical enlightenment has been effective—that it has liberated us from the ideological frozen constraints of the past, and initiated genuine self-reflection. The complexity, strength and deviousness of the forms of resistance; the inadequacy of mere "intellectual understanding" to effect a radical transformation; the fact that any claim of enlightened understanding may itself be a deeper and subtler form of self-deception—these obstacles can never be completely discounted in our evaluation of the success or failure of critique. (3: 218-19)

In our study, we encountered women who simply transferred their identification from one reference group to another with the same absence of critical self-consciousness which characterized their traditional roles and relationships. However, our experience does not support the contention of Berger and Luckmann (2) that perspective transformations, which they refer to as "alternations," involve a replay of the childhood process of primary socialization with its uncritical identification with and emotional dependency upon a new group of significant others. While these writers correctly emphasize the importance of significant others who represent the new and more attractive perspective, and a degree of identification is probably inevitable in the process of taking their perspective, the crucial difference between this process and that of a primary socialization is that adults are capable of being consciously critical or *critically*

reflective in effecting these relationships. Children are critically unselfconscious and usually unaware of how circumstances have contrived to dictate their relationships and commitments to parents or mentors charged with their socialization.

In many cases of perspective transformation new commitments become mediated by a new critical sense of “agency” and personal responsibility. Rather than a simple transfer of identification to a new reference group, a new set of criteria come to govern one’s relationships and to represent conditions governing commitments as well. Rather than simple identification, the process may be more accurately described as one of *contractual solidarity*. Commitments are made with implicit mutual agreement among equals (in the sense of agency) concerning conditions of the relationship, including periodic review and renegotiation with the option of terminating the relationship. Such insistence upon reciprocity and equality often represents positive movement toward greater autonomy and self-determination. A superior perspective is not only one that is a more inclusive or discriminating experience of integrating but also one that is sufficiently permeable to allow one access to other perspectives. This makes possible movement to still more inclusive and discriminating perspectives.

The term contractual solidarity is derived from Erwin Singer, who writes from a psychoanalytic point of view. He has proposed a differentiation between identification and identity development.

It is proposed that the *process of identification* implies the development of a self-definition by adoption, the growth of a self-delineation provided by others, be they individuals such as parents, groups such as nations, or abstract ideologies such as political philosophies. The *process of identity development*, on the other hand, denotes the emergence of a personal definition arrived at by attention to and cultivation of individual experience, be it sensory, aesthetic, or intellectual, a self-delineation which may not be in accord with group values, cultural expectations, and social demands. (23: 162)

Singer adopts the term solidarity to describe, “. . . an independently arrived at agreement with another person and the decision to join him without merging in him and adopting his identity while giving up one’s own self-definition—a joining of partners with full maintenance of individuality” (22:171). Thus, in the development of identity, a kind of alienation from social expectations as given must be followed with a contractual solidarity which enables one to participate in society—or in its reconstruction—rather than to drift into aimlessness, apathy and withdrawal.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

The psychological dimension of “psycho-cultural” assumptions in perspective transformation involves two distinct but interrelated phenomena. The first pertains to the feelings generated by internalized cultural assumptions. Thus stereotyped sex roles carry with them a set of criteria for judging how a good and

successful woman behaves. These can generate strong feelings. One can feel strongly about her conviction that "A woman's place is in the home," and judge women who forego other options as having made noble sacrifices for a selfless principle. This habitual way of thinking and the strong feelings accompanying it are a function of a set of cultural assumptions expressed in terms of sex roles, social conventions and expectations and taboos. A woman's very concept of personal identity can be predicated solely on how well she sees herself fulfilling these cultural prescriptions. When one's definition of self becomes limited to that of a player of roles and an embodiment of biological needs, existential neurosis can result, a malaise of chronic meaninglessness, apathy and aimlessness (14: 1970).

A second set of psychological assumptions which must be brought into critical consciousness before perspective transformation is possible is the result of unresolved childhood dilemmas. Roger Gould (9) has identified these childish assumptions which must be resolved to permit us to respond effectively to the age-related existential dilemmas of adulthood. The distinctions are relatively easy to make between internalized cultural assumptions about traditional sex roles and such childish assumptions as "Life is simple and controllable; there are no significant coexisting contradictory forces within me" or "There is no evil or death in the world. The sinister has been destroyed." However, such childish assumption as "I'll always belong to my parents and believe in their world" with its component assumptions, "If I get any more independent, it will be a disaster," and "I can see the world only through my parent's assumptions," can represent overwhelming barriers to perspective transformation regarding sex role stereotypes, or any other cultural myths for that matter.

REIFICATION

Reification refers to the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were beyond human agency, like laws of nature.¹ Through socialization the social world often appears this way to children. In describing the dynamics of this process, Berger and Luckman anticipate the function of perspective transformation in adulthood:

... the available ethnological and psychological evidence seems to indicate. . . that the original apprehension of the social world is highly reified both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. This implies that an apprehension of reification as a modality of consciousness is dependent upon at least relative *dereification* of consciousness, which is a comparatively late development in history and in any individual biography. (2: 90)

Reification may involve a whole institutional order, specific practices, roles, or one's very identity, as when a person totally identifies with his or her social roles. Traditional perspectives become legitimized both by language and by explicit theories. A person's subjective apprehension is ordered by theories and ideologies which make anticipated events seem natural and correct. But socialization is never

completely successful. Deviant versions of reality provide alternative definitions. Social marginality, contact between previously segregated societies and the collapse of institutional order favor dereification.

There are important transitions involved in learning new roles associated with occupational training or social mobility. However, we fill normal social expectations by making such changes and they represent anticipated continuity with the past. Although there may be no reinterpretation of the past to conform with a newly understood reality, as in perspective transformation, individuals may be assisted to convert these transitions into transformations of perspective.

CRITICAL REFLECTIVITY

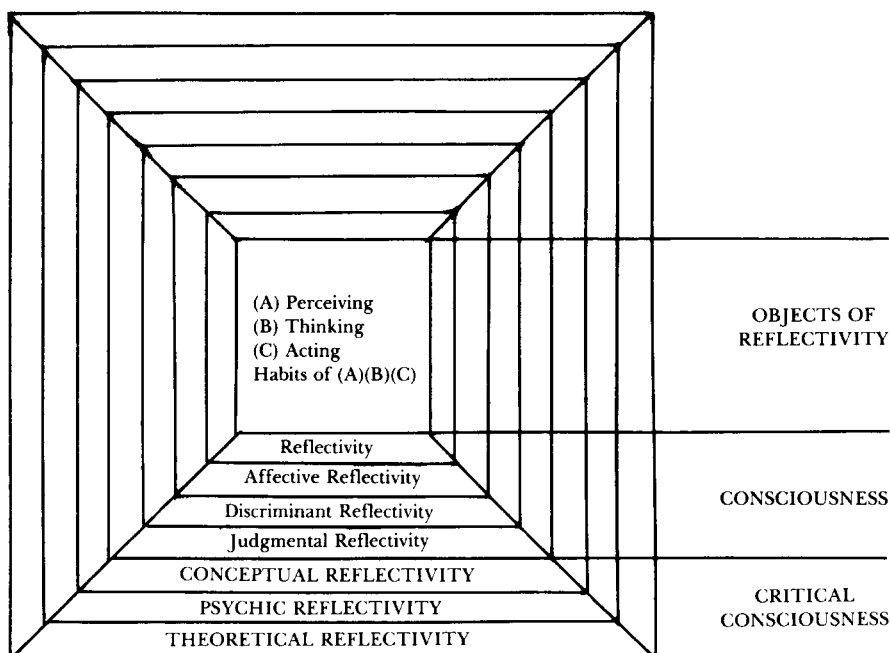
Perspective transformation fills an important gap in adult learning theory by acknowledging the central role played by the function of critical reflectivity. Awareness of *why* we attach the meanings we do to reality, especially to our roles and relationships—meanings often misconstrued out of the uncritically assimilated half-truths of conventional wisdom and power relationships assumed as fixed—may be the most significant distinguishing characteristic of adult learning. It is only in late adolescence and in adulthood that a person can come to recognize being caught in his/her own history and reliving it. “A mind that watches itself” may be Albert Camus’ definition of an intellectual, but it also describes an essential function of learning in adulthood.

Lifespan psychologist John Broughton has evidence that it is only in adulthood that we come to acquire a “theoretical self-consciousness” capable of recognizing paradigmatic assumptions in our thinking. He writes “What emerges at adolescence is not self-consciousness but theoretical self-consciousness, an intellectual competence that enables us to articulate and communicate systematic justifications for the felt necessities of our ideas. Such legitimizing activities require epistemological reasoning about how we know, about how the self knows reality” (4: 95).

Only in late adolescence or adulthood does one find theorizing about alternative paradigms of thought as sets of assumptions which significantly influence our selection of data and our interpretation of evidence. Broughton writes of the “discovery that all has context.”³

The concept of critical reflectivity which plays so crucial a role in the adult learning process and in perspective transformation needs phenomenological study. Figure 1 suggests some principal dimensions of this construct.

FIGURE I Levels of Reflectivity



We can simply become aware of a specific perception, meaning or behavior of our own or of habits we have of seeing, thinking or acting. This is an act of *reflectivity*. *Affective reflectivity* refers to our becoming aware of how we feel about the way we are perceiving, thinking or acting or about our habits of doing so. Through *discriminant reflectivity* we assess the efficacy of our perceptions, thoughts, actions and habits of doing things; identify immediate causes; recognize reality contexts (a play, game, dream, or religious, musical or drug experience, etc.) in which we are functioning and identify our relationships in the situation. *Judgmental reflectivity* involves making and becoming aware of our value judgments about our perceptions, thoughts, actions and habits in terms of their being liked or disliked, beautiful or ugly, positive or negative.

We have seen how political, economic, sexual, technological and other cultural ideologies which we have assimilated become manifest in a set of rules, roles and social expectations which govern the way we see, think, feel and act. These ways of perception, thought and behavior become habituated. Donald Maudsley (15) has adapted the term “meta-learning” to describe “the process by which learners become aware of and increasingly in control of habits of perception, inquiry, learning and growth that they have internalized.” He sees these habits as important elements in understanding meaning perspectives. Meta-learning is a common

element in almost every kind of learning from learning manual skills to learning in psychotherapy. Perspective transformation involves not only becoming critically aware of habits of perception, thought and action but of the cultural assumptions governing the rules, roles, conventions and social expectations which dictate the way we see, think, feel and act.

Critical awareness or critical consciousness is "becoming aware of our awareness" and critiquing it. Some of the ways this is done may be discerned by reflecting upon the assertion "John is bad." The act of self-reflection which might lead one to question whether good or bad are adequate concepts for understanding or judging John may be understood as *conceptual reflectivity*. This is obviously different from the *psychic reflectivity* which leads one to recognize in oneself the habit of making precipitant judgments about people on the basis of limited information about them (as well as recognizing the interests and anticipations which influence the way we perceive, think or act.) These two forms of critical consciousness may be differentiated from what may be called *theoretical reflectivity* by which one becomes aware that the reason for this habit of precipitant judgment or for conceptual inadequacy is a set of taken-for-granted cultural or psychological assumptions which explain personal experience less satisfactorily than another perspective with more functional criteria for seeing, thinking and acting. Theoretical reflectivity is thus the process central to perspective transformation.

There is an implicit ordering in the modes of reflectivity previously described, with most levels of reflectivity incorporating those preceding them in the diagram above. The degree to which these are age-related is unknown. However, critical consciousness—and particularly theoretical reflectivity—represents a uniquely adult capacity and, as such, becomes realized through perspective transformation. Perspective transformation becomes a major learning domain and the uniquely adult learning function. If adult education is to be understood as an organized effort to facilitate learning in the adult years, it has no alternative but to address the distinctive learning needs of adults pertaining to perspective transformation.

Perspective transformation also appears to best account for the process of transition between stages of adult psychological development in major life-span theories. A heightened sense of critical reflectivity is crucial to Erikson's "identity crisis" of late adolescence and to "integrity" in adulthood. It is probably the factor in Lawrence Kohlberg's adult stage of principled morality which separates this stage from those which precede it.⁶ Clearly, this is what Gould is writing about in movement through adult life stages and what Levinson sees as operant in moving through the psychosocial "seasons" of adulthood.

Levinson identified three major adult transitional periods of men occurring between the ages of 17-22, 40-45 and 60-65, each requiring a different perspective and ushering in a qualitatively different period of development with distinctive developmental tasks. He writes,

The most fundamental tasks of a stable period are to make firm choices, rebuild the life structure and enhance one's life within it. Those of the transitional period are to question and reappraise the existing structure, to search for new possibilities in self and world, and to modify the present structure enough so that a new one can be formed. (13: 53)

Our research on perspective transformation in women was confirmed by Levinson's finding that transitional periods are often triggered by what he called "marker events"—our disorienting dilemmas. He observed, "No matter how satisfactory a structure is, in time its utility declines and its flaws generate conflict that leads to modification or transformation of the structure" (13: 55-60).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSPECTIVES

Perspectives are constitutive of experience. They determine how we see, think, feel and behave. Human experience is brought into being through language.⁷ Restricted language codes can arbitrarily distort experience so that it gets shoe-horned into categories of meanings or typifications. Language builds up linguistically circumscribed areas of meaning. Meaning perspectives can incorporate fragmented, incomplete experience involving areas of meaninglessness. Intellectualizing meanings without fully assimilating them in experience contributes to this situation. Because such perspectives afford a limited basis for anticipating events, they are likely to give rise to disorienting dilemmas requiring a different set of criteria for making judgments. Perspectives involve institutionalized ideologies which predicate descriptive categories and rules or conventions governing their use. These involve roles and appropriate relationships and ways of behaving which one can think of as a body of tactics. There are implicit criteria for judging success and failure. Roles and relationships are frequently dichotomized constructs, such as parent-child, man-woman, mother-father, teacher-pupil, employer-employee, saved-damned, priest-parishioner, etc.

Typification is the process of categorizing our perceptions. Typifying always proceeds on the basis of a highly selective sample of information about objects or persons. The cultural ideologies or belief systems we have acquired through socialization provide our "background expectancies" directing the intentionality which influences how we perceive and governs how we typify what we see.

Jerome Bruner (5) has helped establish the constructive nature of ordinary awareness. As we mature, we attempt to improve our ability to anticipate reality by development of categoric or stereotyped systems for sorting out our perceptions. These categories may be a color, a way of judging distance by the relative size of objects, the concept of a Frenchman, or may be in terms of a personality trait like introspective. We tend then to sort all a person's actions in terms of these categories. Experience strengthens the personal category system by reinforcing our expectations about how things are supposed to be. But what we actually experience is the category, which is evoked by a particular stimulus, rather than the occurrence in the real world. We construct a model of the world with our

system of categories, come to expect certain relationships and behaviors to occur and then experience our categories.

Bruner sees a universal direction of intellectual development moving from action—knowing by knowing how to do—to symbolic representation which primarily involves the use of language with rules for forming and transforming propositions and permitting representations not only of what is but also of what is not and what might be. This requires the development of self-consciousness which permits one to make the crucial distinction between one's own psychological reactions and external events. This self-awareness is a precondition for developing the capacity to categorize the same stimuli according to several different criteria or points of view. Through symbolic representation one can dialogue with oneself, and, in imagination, construct the perspective of the other person. Perspective taking then becomes an indispensable heuristic for higher level cognitive and personality development.

Culture impedes or facilitates the development of self-consciousness and ability to make symbolic representations. Thus schooling in traditional societies can make a very special difference by fostering the sort of self-consciousness essential for children and sometimes for illiterate adults to distinguish between their own thought or description about something and the thing itself. This involves the cultivation of individual subjectivity.

In terms of conceptual development, the process of development is toward increasing the tendency to categorize things that share a common attribute (superordinate grouping) rather than an earlier mode of grouping things which fit together in another way, for example, in a story. "The transition from the earlier to the later mode of grouping is handled by 'egocentrism.' Things are alike by virtue of the relationship that 'I' or 'you' have to them, or the action taken toward them by 'I' or 'you' " (6: 27).

Bruner and others have found that cultures vary in the degree to which they encourage the expression of the functions of things in terms of one's personal interaction with them. Some, like the Wolof of Senegal and the Eskimo of Anchorage, value self-reliance and suppress expression of individualism. Their children are less likely to set themselves apart from others and the physical world, are less self-conscious and place less value on themselves (6: 25-28).

The etiology of meaning perspective is illuminated by Bruner's work on the Piagetian concept of "decentration." This refers to the ability to analyze things in the world from a perspective other than one's personal or local perspective. There are several cultural dimensions in the use of language which are found to correlate with the ability to achieve decentration. Lower class children were found far less able to do this than middle class children (6:147). Middle class children more commonly tend to use language as an instrument of analysis and synthesis in abstract problem solving and for decontextualization. This term refers to using language without dependence upon shared perceptions or actions, permitting one to conceive of information as independent of the speaker's point of view and to communicate with those outside one's daily experience regardless of their

affiliation or location. In observing these class related differences in language usage among children, Bruner comments, "I do not know, save by everyday observation, whether the difference is greater still among adults, but my impression is that the difference in decontextualization is greater between an English barrister and a dock worker than it is between their children" (6: 149).

A necessary inference from Bruner's findings is that if indeed some adult cultures discourage the development of self-awareness essential for decentration, for perspective taking and for the acquisition of a sense of identity in their children, these same deprivations and their consequent constraints must, *ipso facto*, pertain in adulthood. Moreover, there is a reason to believe this condition pertains not only to most people in some place but to some people in most places.

George Kelly (12) holds that each person creates his own world by means of dichotomous constructs, such as "black vs white," which are the result of our past experience. We apply these constructs to new experiences as long as they seem to work in anticipating events. We can prove or disprove only the possible alternatives suggested by our construction system. One's system of constructs sets the limits beyond which it is impossible for a person to perceive. Constructs control one's outlook. Kelly believes that even human behavior which has no language symbols nevertheless is psychologically channeled and is included in the network of dichotomous dimensions with which a person's world is structured. Perspectives are systems of such constructs involving what Polanyi refers to as "tacit knowing," unformulated knowledge such as that we have of a problem we are attempting to solve as distinct from explicit or formulated knowledge of which we can become critically reflective.

Orstein writes, "Our senses limit; our central nervous system limits; our personal and cultural categories limit; language limits, and beyond all these selections, the rules of science cause us to further select information which we consider to be true" (21: 41). There are many who would argue that it is less the rules of science and more the unsupportable and pervasive ideologies of scientism and technicism which shape our conception of reality.

A CRITICAL THEORY OF ADULT EDUCATION

We have examined in some detail the nature and development of perspective transformation as the third—and the uniquely adult—of Habermas' three domains of learning. By clearly differentiating these three interrelated but distinct "knowledge constitutive" areas of cognitive interest, Habermas has provided the foundation for formulating a comprehensive theory of adult education. As each domain has its own learning goal (*viz.*, learning for task-related competence, learning for interpersonal understanding and learning for perspective transformation), learning needs, approaches for facilitating learning, methods of research and program evaluation are implied or explicit.

This extension of Habermas' theory of areas of cognitive interest is reinforced by the experience of adult educators. We have understood through conventional

wisdom that educational design and methodology must be a function of the learning needs of adults and that formula or package programs which do not fully address the differences in goal and nature of the learning task are of questionable value. Perhaps it is because we have been marginal to the mainstream of education for so long that we have been able to sustain our own rather distinctive perspective on learner centeredness in conceptualizing our role. At any rate, we have tacitly recognized the vast differences in helping adults learn how to do something or to perform a task from helping them develop sensitivity and understanding in social relations and from helping them effect perspective transformation.

As educators, we need not concern ourselves with the philosophical question of whether Habermas has succeeded in establishing the epistemological status of the primary knowledge-constitutive interests with categorically distinct object domains, types of experience and corresponding forms of inquiry. There is sufficient force in his analysis to warrant serious examination of this contention as a hypothesis for investigation of and design of appropriate approaches for facilitating learning relevant to these three domains of learning. Despite their obvious interrelatedness in everyday life, a compelling argument has been made for recognizing that each involves its own different way of knowing and each is different enough to require its own appropriate mode of inquiry and educational strategy and tactics.

Educators have not only failed to recognize the crucial distinction among the three domains, but have assumed that the mode of inquiry derived from the empirical-analytic sciences is equally appropriate to all three learning domains. The behavioral change model of adult education—derived from this approach and therefore appropriate to facilitating learning concerned with controlling and manipulating the environment—has been indiscriminately applied as appropriate to the other domains as well. This misconception has become so pervasive that the very definition of education itself is almost universally understood in terms of an organized effort to facilitate behavioral change. Behaviorism has become a strongly institutionalized ideology in both psychology and education. Habermas' analysis of primary cognitive interests helps us demythify the learning process as well as our way of thinking about facilitating learning.

If you were to ask most professionals in adult education to outline how they would conceptualize program development, the model would probably be one which sets educational objectives in terms of specific behaviors to be acquired as dictated by a task to be accomplished. The task or role to be played is analyzed to establish its requisite skills, behaviors or "competencies." This is often referred to as a "task analysis." The difference would constitute a "needs assessment." An educational program is composed of a sequence of educational exercises reduced to their component elements with immediate feedback on each learning effort. Education is evaluated by subtracting measured learning gains in skills or competencies from behavioral objectives.

There is nothing wrong with this rather mechanistic approach to education as long as it is confined to task-oriented learning common to the "technical" domain

of learning to control and manipulate the environment. It is here such familiar concepts as education for behavior change, behavioral objectives, needs assessment, competency-based education, task analysis, skill training, accountability and criteria-referenced evaluation are appropriate and useful. In this domain research and program evaluation based upon the empirical-analytic model of inquiry have relevance and power.

It is only when educators address the other two domains of learning, social interaction—including educational process—and perspective transformation, using the same model that they have been wrong and generally ineffectual. The most common form this has taken is to attempt to broaden behavioral skills necessary to perform the task for which education is required. The assumption is that these are learned much like any other behavioral skill except that practice occasionally requires the use of hypothetical reality contexts, such as role playing, which are unnecessary in learning to operate a lathe or to perform other manual tasks.

Inherently different modes of systematic inquiry and educational design are implicit in the processes involved in the other two primary domains of learning. The second, social interaction, calls for an educational approach which focuses on helping learners interpret the ways they and others with whom they are involved construct meanings, ways they typify and label others and what they do and say as we interact with them. Our task is to help learners enhance their understanding of and sensitivity to the way others anticipate, perceive, think and feel while involved with the learner in common endeavors. Educators can assist adults to learn to take the role of others, to develop empathy and to develop confidence and competence in such aspects of human relations as resolving conflict, participating in discussion and dialogue, participating and leading in learning groups, listening, expressing oneself, asking questions, philosophizing, differentiating 'in order to' motives from 'because' motives and theorizing about symbolic interaction. Studies of symbolic interaction, "grounded theory" strategies of comparative analysis and phenomenological analyses seem especially appropriate for both educational research—especially that relating to educational process—and evaluation.⁸ Our work through the Center for Adult Education would be included in these efforts (17, 19, 20).

Perspective transformation, the process central to the third learning domain, involves other educational approaches. Here the emphasis is on helping the learner identify real problems involving reified power relationships rooted in institutionalized ideologies which one has internalized in one's psychological history. Learners must consequently be led to an understanding of the reasons imbedded in these internalized cultural myths and concomitant feelings which account for their felt needs and wants as well as the way they see themselves and their relations. Having gained this understanding, learners must be given access to alternative meaning perspectives for interpreting this reality so that critique of these psycho-cultural assumptions is possible.

Freire has demonstrated how adult educators can precipitate as well as facilitate and reinforce perspective transformation. Beginning with the problems and perspectives of the learner, the educator develops a series of projective instructional materials—contrasting pictures, comic strips or stories posing hypothetical dilemmas with contradicting rules and assumptions rooted in areas of crucial concern to learners. Included will be representations of cultural discrepancies perceived by the educator which are taken for granted by the learners. Socratic dialogue is used in small group settings involving learners who are facing a common dilemma to elicit and challenge psycho-cultural assumptions behind habituated ways of perceiving, thinking, feeling and behaving. Emphasis is given equality and reciprocity in building a support group through which learners can share experiences with a common problem and come to share a new perspective. An ethos of support, encouragement, non-judgmental acceptance, mutual help and individual responsibility is created. Alternative perspectives are presented with different value systems and ways of seeing.

Where adults come together in response to the same existential dilemma for the purpose of finding direction and meaning, projective instructional materials may be unnecessary. In a support group situation in which conditions for Habermas' "ideal speech" is approximated, all alternative perspectives relevant to the situation are presented. Critical reflexivity is fostered with a premium placed on personalizing what is learned by applying insights to one's own life and works as opposed to mere intellectualization. Conceptual learning needs to be integrated with emotional and aesthetic experience.

The research technique used by ethnomethodologists called "breaching" for studying meaning perspectives might also be used as an effective instructional method to foster perspective transformation. This would involve educational experiences which challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions about relationships in order to call them into critical consciousness. For example, learners used to traditional teacher-student relationships can be helped to examine implicit assumptions by being placed in a learning situation in which the educator refuses to play the traditional authority role of information giver or activities director but rather limits his or her response to that of a resource person. This typically generates strong negative feelings in learners who are unable to cope with the unexpected lack of structure. By subsequently helping learners see the reasons for their feelings rooted in the assumptions of an institutionalized ideology, real progress can be made toward perspective transformation. Through similar modified T group⁹ experiences with provision for a continuing support structure, individuals can be helped to recognize the way psycho-cultural assumptions about authority relationships have generated their habits of perception, thought and behavior and be assisted to plan and take action.

While Habermas is correct in suggesting that psychoanalysis and critique of ideology are appropriate methods for inquiry in this domain of learning, they are also appropriate educational methods. The process of perspective transformation

may also be studied using interviews; comparing movement in problem awareness, expectations and goals; or through comparative analysis to inductively ascertain commonalities.

Perspective transformation, following the cycle delineated earlier, also involves learning needs attendant upon systematically examining existing options, building confidence through competence in new roles, acquiring knowledge and skills to implement one's plans and provisionally trying out new roles and relationships. These learning needs involve all three learning domains. In everyday life few situations (e.g., self-instruction in a manual skill) will involve only one learning domain. They are intricately intertwined. To be able to facilitate learning adult educators must master the professional demands of all three and become adept at working with learners in ways that will be sensitive to both the interrelatedness and inherent differences among them.

I see no serious ethical issues involved in education for perspective transformation. Helping adults construe experience in a way in which they may more clearly understand the reasons for their problems and understand the options open to them so that they may assume responsibility for decision making is the essence of education. Bringing psycho-cultural assumptions into critical consciousness to help a person understand how he or she has come into possession of conceptual categories, rules, tactics and criteria for judging implicit in habits of perception, thought and behavior involves perhaps the most significant kind of learning. It increases a crucial sense of agency over ourselves and our lives. To help a learner become aware of alternative meaning perspectives relevant to his situation, to become acquainted with them, to become open to them and to make use of them 'to more clearly understand does not prescribe the correct action to be taken. The meaning perspective does not tell the learner what to do; it presents a set of rules, tactics and criteria for judging. The decision to assume a new meaning perspective clearly implies action, but the behavior that results will depend upon situational factors, the knowledge and skills for taking effective action and personality variables discussed earlier.

Education becomes indoctrination only when the educator tries to influence a specific action as an extension of his will, or perhaps when he blindly helps a learner blindly follow the dictates of an unexamined set of cultural assumptions about who he is and the nature of his relationships. To show someone a new set of rules, tactics and criteria for judging which clarify the situation in which he or she must act is significantly different from trying to engineer learner consent to take the actions favored by the educator within the new perspective. This does not suggest that the educator is value free. His selection of alternative meaning perspectives will reflect his own cultural values, including his professional ideology—for adult educators one which commits us to the concept of learner self-directedness as both the means and the end of education.

Inasmuch as the overwhelming proportion of adult learning is self-directed (24) and uses the experience of others as resources in problem solving, those

relatively few occasions when an adult requires the help of an adult educator must be understood in their broader context. Clearly, we must attempt to provide the specialized educational resource adult learners seek when they choose to use an adult educator, but our professional perspective needs to be unequivocal: we must respond to the learner's educational need in a way which will improve the quality of his or her self-directedness as a learner. To do less is to perpetuate a dysfunctional dependency relationship between learner and educator, a reification of an institutionalized ideology rooted in the socialization process.

Although the diversity of experience labeled adult education includes any organized and sustained effort to facilitate learning and, as such, tends to mean many things to many people, a set of standards derived from the generic characteristics of adult development has emerged from research and professional practice in our collective definition of the function of an adult educator. It is almost universally recognized, at least in theory, that central to the adult educator's function is *a goal and method of self-directed learning*. Enhancing the learner's ability for self direction in learning as a foundation for a distinctive philosophy of adult education has breadth and power. It represents the mode of learning characteristic of adulthood.

Each of three distinct but interrelated domains—controlling and manipulating the environment, social interaction and perspective transformation—involves different ways of knowing and hence different learning needs, different educational strategies and methods and different techniques of research and evaluation. A self-directed learner must be understood as one who is aware of the constraints on his efforts to learn, including the psycho-cultural assumptions involving reified power relationships embedded in institutionalized ideologies which influence one's habits of perception, thought and behavior as one attempts to learn. A self-directed learner has access to alternative perspectives for understanding his or her situation and for giving meaning and direction to his or her life, has acquired sensitivity and competence in social interaction and has the skills and competencies required to master the productive tasks associated with controlling and manipulating the environment.

A CHARTER FOR ANDRAGOGY

Andragogy, as a professional perspective of adult educators, must be defined as an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn *in a way that enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners*. To do this it must:

1. progressively decrease the learner's dependency on the educator;
2. help the learner understand how to use learning resources—especially the experience of others, including the educator, and how to engage others in reciprocal learning relationships;
3. assist the learner to define his/her learning needs—both in terms of immediate awareness and of understanding the cultural and psychological assumptions influencing his/her perceptions of needs;
4. assist learners to assume increasing responsibility for defining their learning objectives, planning their own learning program and evaluating their progress;

5. organize what is to be learned in relationship to his/her current personal problems, concerns and levels of understanding;
6. foster learner decision making—select learner-relevant learning experiences which require choosing, expand the learner's range of options, facilitate taking the perspectives of others who have alternative ways of understanding;
7. encourage the use of criteria for judging which are increasingly inclusive and differentiating in awareness, self-reflexive and integrative of experience;
8. foster a self-corrective reflexive approach to learning—to typifying and labeling, to perspective taking and choosing, and to habits of learning and learning relationships;
9. facilitate problem posing and problem solving, including problems associated with the implementation of individual and collective action; recognition of relationship between personal problems and public issues;
10. reinforce the self-concept of the learner as a learner and doer by providing for progressive mastery; a supportive climate with feedback to encourage provisional efforts to change and to take risks; avoidance of competitive judgment of performance; appropriate use of mutual support groups;
11. emphasize experiential, participative and projective instructional methods; appropriate use of modeling and learning contracts;
12. make the moral distinction between helping the learner understand his/her full range of choices and how to improve the quality of choosing vs encouraging the learner to make a specific choice.

I believe the recognition of the function of perspective transformation within the context of learning domains, as suggested by Habermas' theory, contributes to a clearer understanding of the learning needs of adults and hence the function of education. When combined with the concept of self-directedness as the goal and the means of adult education, the essential elements of a comprehensive theory of adult learning and education have been identified. The formulation of such a theory for guiding professional practice is perhaps our single greatest challenge in this period of unprecedented expansion of adult education programs and activities. It is a task to command our best collective effort.

FOOTNOTES

1. The treatment of Habermas' most important concepts within the limitations of this article are necessarily brief and superficial. The interested reader is referred to Trent Schroyer's *The Critique of Domination: the Origins and Development of Critical Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973) and Thomas McCarthy's *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979), the most complete synthesis of Habermas' work in English. For serious students, "Jurgen Habermas: the Complete Oeuvre. A Bibliography of Primary Literature, Translations and Reviews" by Rene Gortzen and Frederik van Gelder may be found in *Human Studies* 2 (1970), 285-300.
2. See Bauman, Zygmunt. *Hermeneutics and Social Science*. N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1978.
3. See Gabel, Joseph. *False Consciousness; An Essay on Reification*. N.Y.: Harper Torchbooks, 1975.
4. See Peter Berger and Stanley Pullburg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," *History and Theory* 4, (1965) 196-211.
5. Also read Carol Gilligan and John Michael Murphy. "Development from Adolescence to Adulthood: The Philosopher and the Dilemma of the Fact" in *New Directions of Child Development*. Deanna Kuhn (Ed.) San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1979. These writers report empirical findings in a longitudinal study of a cognitive developmental progression in late adolescence toward more "dialectical or contextual structures of thought."
6. See John C. Gibbs, "Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Judgment: A Constructive Critique," *Harvard Educational Review* 47 (1977), 43-61.
7. Giddens (8: 142) notes that Wittgenstein's "language games," James' and Schutz's "multiple realities," Castaneda's "alternative realities," Whorf's "language structures," Bachelard's and Althusser's "problematics," and Kuhn's "paradigms" each is used to show that the meanings of terms, expressions, or

descriptions have to be understood in relation to "frames of meaning." Foucault's "episteme" deals directly with this concept as well. He uses this term to refer to the composite "codes" of a culture governing its schemes of perception, language, values and the order of its practices.

8. For a review of related research see A. Jon Magoon, "Constructivist Approaches in Educational Research," *Review of Educational Research* 47 (1977), 651-693.
9. Conventional T group experience fosters psychic rather than theoretical reflexivity.

REFERENCES

1. Arlin, Patricia. "Cognitive Development in Adulthood: A Fifth Stage?" *Developmental Psychology* 11 (1975), 602-606.
2. Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966.
3. Bernstein, Richard J. *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978.
4. Broughton, John. "'Beyond Formal Operations': Theoretical Thought in Adolescence," *Teachers College Record* 79 (1977), 87-97.
5. Bruner, Jerome. "On Perceptual Readiness." *Psychological Review* 64 (1957), 123-152.
6. Bruner, Jerome. *The Relevance of Education*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1973.
7. Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herter and Herter, 1970.
8. Giddens, Anthony. *New Rules of Sociological Method*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.
9. Gould, Roger L. *Transformations: Growth and Change in Adult Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978.
10. Habermas, Jurgen. *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.
11. Habermas, Jurgen. *Toward a Rational Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
12. Kelly, George A. *A Theory of Personality: The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1955.
13. Levinson, Daniel, et al. *The Seasons of a Man's Life*. New York: Knopf, 1978.
14. Maddi, Salvatore. "The Existential Neurosis," in *Psychopathology Today*, R. S. Sahakian (ed.). New York: Peacock Press, 1970.
15. Maudsley, Donald B. "A Theory of Meta-Learning and Principles of Facilitation: An Organismic Perspective." Doctoral dissertation, Toronto: University of Toronto, 1979.
16. Mezirow, Jack. *Education for Perspective Transformation: Women's Re-entry Programs in Community Colleges*. New York: Center for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1975.
17. Mezirow, Jack. *Evaluating Statewide Programs of Adult Basic Education: A Design with Instrumentation*. New York: Center for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1975.
18. Mezirow, Jack. "Perspective Transformation," *Adult Education* 28 (1978), 100-110.

19. Mezirow, Jack and Amy Rose. *An Evaluation Guide for College Women's Re-entry Programs*. New York: Center for Adult Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1978.
20. Mezirow, Jack, Gordon Darkenwald, Alan Knox. *Last Gamble on Education: Dynamics of Adult Basic Education*. Washington, D.C.: Adult Education Association of USA, 1975.
21. Ornstein, Robert E. *The Psychology of Consciousness*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1973.
22. Rogers, Carl, "The Formative Tendency," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 18 (1978), 23-26.
23. Singer, Irwin. "Identity and Identification: A Thorny Psychological Issue," *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 5 (1965), 140-148.
24. Tough, Allen. "Major Learning Efforts: Recent Research and Future Directions," *The Adult Learner, Current Issues in Higher Education*. National Conference Series. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1978.