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## CRITICAL THEORY AND BEYOND: FURTHER PERSPECTIVES ON EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

MECHTHILD HART

### ABSTRACT

Although emancipatory education and a critical theory of education are only rarely addressed in adult education, they provide rich opportunities for discussing primary issues of adult education. The purpose of this analysis is to contribute to the debate on the issue of emancipatory education, especially as begun by Jack Mezirow with his critical concept of adult education. Although Mezirow borrows important distinctions from Juergen Habermas' critical theory, his use of these distinctions neglects the radical impetus behind Habermas' writings. In addition, both Mezirow's and Habermas' conceptual frameworks emerge as being too rationalist for a broader, more encompassing concept of emancipatory education.

The winter and spring issues of the 1989 *Adult Education Quarterly* started a discussion for adult educators which raises a number of highly important issues and questions. Since I share many of the concerns Jack Mezirow addresses in his writings, as well as some of the criticisms made by Susan Collard and Michael Law, I would like to continue this debate.

As someone who has been concerned with the on going dearth of critical theories in the field of adult education, and who has herself been working extensively with Habermas' theories, I profoundly appreciate Mezirow's introduction of some of Habermas' major concepts into our theoretical landscape. In particular, the importance of his attempts to draw on such distinctions as "communicative" and "instrumental learning" cannot be overestimated because this attempt is based on a concern for forms of education which are liberating rather than merely adjusting, and which point to new possibilities for thought and action rather than fixate the learner to the status quo. This concern is rarely expressed with such clarity by American adult educators.

If I offer some criticism of Mezirow's theories in the following, this should be seen as arising out of my interest in deepening our understanding of emancipatory education, rather than my interest in questioning Mezirow's interpretation of Habermas. By assuming this larger perspective I will concentrate only on some aspects of Mezirow's theories and will therefore not do justice to his overall work. I will criticize him mainly for his treatment of

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certain categories developed by Habermas, categories which are inherently useful for an illumination of the concept of emancipatory education, but which lose a considerable portion of their usefulness through the way Mezirow employs them in his own theories. I will describe how Mezirow's use of the prime categories of communicative and instrumental action severs the systematic and intrinsic relationship of Habermas' theory with a critique of power. I will further discuss how the dimension of "social action" emerges in somewhat different terms than either Collard and Law or Mezirow suggest. I propose that educators need to understand the social or non-individual causes of the distortions they are attempting to correct, not only because they want to be successful, and because as members of society they are drawn into the very same force field of power as their students, but also because power enters the interactional structure of the educational situation itself. Finally, I will point to some weaknesses in a concept of emancipatory education which moves exclusively within the realm of cognition, and I will discuss how emancipatory education must not only question the immorality of power, but also nurture a new morality of non-oppressive, caring relationships among all the participants in an educational situation.

### THE CRITICAL PROJECT OF EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

Underlying Habermas' extensive body of writing lies a fundamental concern for dominance-free forms of social relations. In particular, his ideal of dominance-free communication directly speaks of forms of life which are not power-bound, but which are based on and allow for an authentic consensus among all those concerned about what norms shall guide their actions.

It is my contention that by not placing the issue of power or dominance relations at the center of the concept of critique or critical educational theory, Mezirow essentially declaws a body of theory and writing which ultimately leads to a questioning of the entire normative base of our social and economic arrangements. Habermas' "ideal speech situation" (1970b, 1973), for instance, does not stop short at the ability of individuals to critically reflect on their own experience, as Mezirow's interpretation seems to indicate, but points to *power-free communication*, and therefore to immediate moral-practical consequences.<sup>1</sup> This is where the dimension of "social action" emerges, although not necessarily in the conventional contrasting terms of "revolutionary" or "reformist" social movements (see Mezirow, 1989, p. 172). Rather, a political, "social action" dimension is *inherent* in Habermas' overall body of work, and his primary categories of communicative and purposive-rational action (on which Mezirow bases his distinctions of dialogic and instrumental learning) intrinsically point to radical social action.<sup>2</sup>

My criticism of Mezirow therefore partly converges with some of the questions raised by Collard and Law (1989), particularly as regards Mezirow's containment of the radical potential of his own as well as Habermas' concern for liberation or emancipation, and his failure to address

the full range of social, political (and thus educational) implications which are contained in Habermas' overall critical project. These implications cannot be ignored in a theory which rests on major premises of Habermas' critical theory. Mezirow therefore presents a somewhat truncated version of Habermas' theory of communicative action, and his use of the categories of "communicative" and "instrumental" severs the *systematic* and intrinsic relationship of this theory with a critique of power (and the latter's practical implications for emancipatory action). I see this reflected above all in Mezirow's *descriptive-analytical* rather than *critical* use of Habermas' later theoretical framework. As I shall discuss below, Mezirow analytically separates different learning domains or functions without discussing the nature of their relationship to each other. However, it is precisely in the varying and always problematic nature of the relationship between communicative and instrumental-strategic action where the issues of power, and of critique and emancipatory action, are located. I therefore agree with Collard and Law (1989, p. 105) who state that "Mezirow is unsure about where to locate his emancipatory theory." Because he does not place the issue of power and its relationships of dominance at the center of such a theory, Mezirow's treatment of the issue is uneven as well as somewhat non-committal.

### THE DISTORTING EFFECT OF POWER

Mezirow offers distinctions and ideas to adult educators which call for fundamental changes in their students' ways of thinking about and relating to the world (as in "perspective transformation"), and he tries to systematize the areas of "distortions" requiring such fundamental changes or transformations. He does this, however, without directly criticizing current economic, social, and political arrangements which are inherently tied to these "distortions." Although he does not consider this to be an explicit task for the educator, he nevertheless concedes that in the process of critically reflecting upon their experience the learners may recognize how their individual experience is largely shaped by society's norms and institutional arrangements. I want to claim, however, that an educator who wants to develop effective emancipatory practices needs to fully understand the social nature and origins of the distortions which are the declared object of these practices. Good education, like good health care, needs to be explicitly concerned with the causes even when it treats the symptoms.

More recently, Mezirow draws distinctions between "epistemic," "socio-cultural," and "psychic" distortions in meaning perspectives (1989; more fully developed in *Fostering Critical Reflection*, in press). He develops these distinctions in conjunction with his theory of perspective transformation which, in turn, is connected with his distinctions between "instrumental" and "communicative learning." From the perspective of emancipatory education, Mezirow's discussions of these concepts are highly unsatisfactory because the distortions he describes cover a broad range of phenomena, only some

of which are inherently linked to (internal or external) dominance relations. There exist, no doubt, a number of distortions which have to do with things other than oppression. Mental illness, for instance, could be considered a form of distortion that may be primarily connected with the unique biography of individuals, or with entirely idiosyncratic circumstances. Mezirow's own example of "thinking concretely when abstract thought is necessary" (1989, p. 173) certainly refers to an "epistemic distortion," but not necessarily, or only very indirectly, to dominance relations as their ultimate cause. Mezirow may claim that his concern is precisely with a systematic as well as inclusive list of "distortions of meaning perspectives" rather than power structures. However, a major portion of Mezirow's theories remains indebted to the core Habermasian distinctions of "communicative" and "instrumental rationality," thus committing him to the theoretical and political impetus behind Habermas' conceptual framework. The term "distortions" therefore also reverberates with the meanings of Habermas' concept of "systematically distorted communication" (1970a) which he describes as a result of power structures which have permanently settled in individual consciousness, and, as I shall discuss below, which are ultimately a form of confusion between strategic and communicative action. Furthermore, the notion of emancipatory education remains one of Mezirow's leitmotifs, particularly in conjunction with critical reflection, and the meaning of these concepts is based on Habermas' idea of a critical "practical discourse" (1973, 1979, 1984). Within the framework of critical theory, practical discourse and critique refer precisely to the process of investigating and denouncing social and individual damages caused by power. Whether he likes it or not, by employing these categories Mezirow takes over their meanings and connotations as well and therefore inevitably gets tangled up with the issue of power.

### THE PRIMACY OF COMMUNICATIVE ACTION

Mezirow's failure to systematically address the dimension of power is reflected in his descriptive-analytical use of Habermas' two primary categories of "communicative" and "purposive-rational action" (which Habermas further divides into instrumental and strategic action; see 1970c, 1979, 1984). Mezirow uses these categories to make distinctions between different kinds of learning domains or learning functions but does not consider them in relation to each other. However, it is precisely this relationship, and the various ways it can be established, interpreted, or misused which is at the core of Habermas' critical theory. Habermas is concerned with confusions, misplaced importances, and the establishment of false separations or hierarchies between these two forms of social action and corresponding modes of rationality, and only secondarily with describing their nature and differences. "Distortions," or "communicative disturbances" as Habermas calls them (1970a), are therefore actually forms of wrong relationships between strategic and communicative action. They are wrong in the sense of making truly human communication based on mutuality and reciprocity im-

possible, thus violating the ideal of communicative rationality. In terms of his overall critical project, Habermas is concerned with "Rationalism Divided in Two" (1974) and with the supremacy of instrumental rationality. At the core of Habermas' critique of instrumental rationality, therefore, lie his concern with the inseparable alignment of instrumental rationality with power; his concern with the ongoing process of stripping rationality from the normative context of life-worlds; and his concern with the loss of the idea of social solidarity and of action oriented towards mutual understanding rather than towards individual self-preservation (1984). His theory of communicative action therefore establishes the normative foundations of a critical theory of society. Within the framework of this theory, instrumental rationality is only a *partial* aspect of the more comprehensive form of communicative rationality.

In Habermas' theories, communicative action therefore functions as the primary category, reflecting his primary concern with dominance relations. Likewise, an educational theory that discusses and explains important educational phenomena with Habermasian categories has to be firmly anchored in the idea of dominance-free communication and dominance-free forms of life. In other words, education has to be defined primarily in terms of the larger, more inclusive category of *communicative action*. This is also the domain where the very possibility of critique is located.

In Mezirow's writings, critique, critical reflection, and perspective transformation are all prime categories. However, he fails to unequivocally place them within the realm of communicative rather than instrumental-strategic rationality. For instance, understanding the meaning of something or changing one's meaning perspective are by nature communicative processes which cannot be achieved "instrumentally" or "through instrumental learning" as Mezirow claims (1985, pp. 23-24). His own example of the urban planner who changes his "metaphorical assumptions" about the nature of a slum illustrates this very well: To change one's view of a slum as "a blighted community" to that of "a natural community" (Mezirow, 1985, p. 24) requires stepping out of the paradigm of an instrumental means-ends rationality and engaging in a process of *understanding* and of critically questioning and assessing the normative assumptions of each interpretation. The primary changes therefore take place with respect to the "social boundary conditions" (Habermas, 1979, p. 121) of urban planning, and only secondarily with respect to the various strategic activities that are to follow.

To start from the center of communicative action also means that the relationship between "dialogic" and "instrumental learning" is not one of mere juxtaposition or (simple) analytical and practical difference. It is potentially problematic, because, as the above-mentioned example of urban planning indicated, "instrumental learning" is *always* embedded in a communicative or normative context which legitimizes its appropriateness. We can imagine cases, for instance, where instrumental learning is emphasized in situations which actually call for dialogic learning. As Mezirow himself points out, "perhaps the most pervasive distortion in the field of continuing



education results from our assumption that all adult learning proceeds exactly as instrumental learning does" (1985, p. 18). Another example can be found in much of the behavior suggested under the rubric of "interpersonal skills" where a number of strategic (and ultimately manipulative) forms of interaction are proposed. From the perspective of efficiency and control, the primary goals of instrumental-strategic learning, these strategies may be highly effective, and such behavior is entirely rational. From the perspective of truly human interaction, however, such behavior is irrational because it violates the ideal of reciprocity and mutuality, that is, of communicative rationality. Critique here questions the morality of the norms of efficiency and control as guiding human interaction. However, only by stepping out of the strategic action context can critique achieve this task, can the normative premises of efficiency and control be recognized and criticized as strategically structuring all interaction from the outset.

Many different interpretations of critique and critical reflection are possible, with different purposes, and involving different procedures. From the perspective of emancipatory education, however, the meaning of critique is inseparably linked to questioning those norms which stabilize relations of force. Critique can therefore take place only in the medium of communicative action.

## POWER AND HUMAN INTERACTION

As we have seen, different kinds of distortions of one's perception of reality exist, not all of which bear the stamp of dominance relations. Not all forms of distortion are therefore relevant for explicitly emancipatory educational practices, which are concerned primarily with those distortions that violate the ideal of dominance-free communication (ie., that occur on the level of *human interaction*).

By placing the issue of power at the center of analysis, and by viewing emancipatory education primarily as a form of communicative action, the list of distortions that is of relevance for emancipatory education is closely associated with the three dimensions of communicative action (and therefore differs from Mezirow's list of "distortions in meaning perspectives"): the social-cultural, the interpersonal, and the intrapersonal dimension. As should become clear in the following, all three are closely interrelated, and an attempt to critique one distortion, occurring within one particular dimension, can never be severed from a critique of the other two. While analytically distinct, in reality they are always fully interrelated.

### The Social-cultural Level of Distortions

On the social-cultural level, distortions can be investigated with respect to ideologies, or value and belief systems, which have the power to "immunize" norms against critique. In Habermas' words, ideologies explicitly justify inequalities by "proving that the validity claims of norm systems are legitimate

and of avoiding thematization and testing of discursive validity claims. The specific achievement of such ideologies consists in the inconspicuous manner in which communication is systematically limited" (1975, pp. 112-113). In other words, ideologies freeze the possibility to move from "consensual action," that is, action based on an unquestioned, taken-for-granted consensus, to discourse, where the normative assumptions of this consensus are called into question (Habermas, 1973, 1979, 1984). Such testing of the validity claims of norms will allow the participants in such a process to distinguish "justifiable norms...from norms that merely stabilize relations of force" (Habermas, 1975, p. 111).

Emancipatory education is here mainly concerned with ways to unfreeze the dimension of criticizability of norms by thematizing them and questioning their legitimacy. For instance, the ideology of masculinity and femininity can explicitly be examined in terms of its constitutive elements, its matrix of norms, values, and beliefs, and its relationship to individual behavior patterns and social institutions. "Consciousness-raising" and "conscientization" provide examples of educational programs which address distortions on this level (see the respective contributions to *Fostering Critical Self-Reflection*, Mezirow, in press).

To say that norms have the power to govern socially sanctioned behavior means, on a deeper level, to say that norms interpret and determine what are to be considered legitimate (or illegitimate) expressions of needs, interests, or intentions. Values, beliefs, hopes, wishes, all of which are attached to norms, always contain certain interpretations of needs and interests. Normative systems therefore supply us with entire patterns of interpretations for all our interests, desires, and aspirations. We cannot express our interests without taking recourse to pre-given patterns of interpretation. Of special significance is the fact that these interpretations contain evaluations of the degree of social acceptability of needs and interests. In the last analysis, norms therefore "regulate legitimate chances for need gratification" (Habermas, 1973, p. 251). Consequently, they regulate which needs are allowed to be gratified by whom and which ones are subject to various censoring and repressing mechanisms. The normative systems of femininity and masculinity, for instance, can be described as unjust systems of regulating chances for need gratification because traditionally women's interests have been interpreted mainly in relation to the satisfaction of men's interests (see also Hart, 1985 in press).

### The Interpersonal Level of Distortions

The above example serves to illustrate how norms and normative systems establish self-perpetuating forms of power-bound, distorted human interaction, the second level of distortions of concern to emancipatory education. For example, the concepts of femininity and masculinity represent elaborate, all-encompassing prescriptions for the way men and women are allowed to relate to each other, to members of their own sex, and to themselves. In one



way or another, all of these behavior patterns bear the insignia of inequality and power. They therefore not only express distorted communicative experiences, but they also perpetuate these distortions in each and every "normal" (i.e. socially sanctioned) interactive encounter. As mentioned above, emancipatory educators must be aware of the systemic nature of these distortions (and of those issuing from other structures of inequality such as racism or class oppression). But they must also be aware of how these behavior patterns are brought into the educational situation and affect the interaction among *all* the participants—learners as well as educators. No one can live outside of the categories of masculine and feminine, white and black, and old and young, all of which pattern our perceptions and behavior according to the hierarchies and inequalities they signify, thus—in however subtle ways—perpetuating oppressive relations. Emancipatory educators not only need to be conscious of these interactional distortions (and their own involvement in them), but they must also organize the educational experience in a way which is conducive to the creation of power-free relations among all the participants (for a more detailed discussion of this issue see Hart, in press). The critical-analytical dimension of emancipatory education here joins with its relational, and thus its anticipatory-utopian dimension. This is the essence of emancipatory education.

### The Intrapersonal Level of Distortions

If one accepts the task of building dominance-free forms of human interaction, one is confronted with yet another distortion: the psychological deep structure of relations of force. According to Habermas, power which has permanently settled in an individual's consciousness and self-identity appears in the form of unconscious motivations. This is a pathology which violates the condition of truthfulness or "unimpaired self-representation" (1970b, p. 372). Truthfulness is one of the prime conditions for undistorted communication (aside from the truth of facts and the rightness of norms, see Habermas, 1979, 1984). Unconscious motivations create "pseudo-communication, where the participants do not recognize any communicative disturbances. Pseudo-communication produces a system of reciprocal misunderstandings which, due to the false assumption of consensus, are not recognized as such" (Habermas 1970a, p. 206).

Pseudo-communication can be described as a confusion between strategic and communicative action. Habermas (1970a) describes "systematically distorted communication" in terms of a person's mistaken but sincerely held belief that she is acting truly communicatively, that she is relating to the other party of the communication in a truly reciprocal way, while in reality she is acting according to the imperatives of her private needs and interests.

Unconscious motivations or repressed needs present a problem to emancipatory education as they seem to call for more explicitly therapeutic rather than educational interventions. This poses the question concerning the boundaries between psychotherapy and emancipatory education, a question

which I am not prepared to address within the framework of this paper but which should be pursued in another context. At this point in my thinking I see a difference between the two at least to the extent to which the essentially individualistic, apolitical therapeutic modalities that exist today tend to dichotomize the social and the individual. Emancipatory education, on the other hand, needs to keep intact the dialectical tension between these two realities and needs to address the individual, deep-psychological distortions in ways which take their social origin in relations of dominance into consideration. This means, among other things, that critical self-reflection cannot be separated from ideology critique. However, as mentioned before, emancipatory education not only has the task of engaging in a radical critique of external and internal relations of force, but also the task of creating power-free communal relationships. Herein lies the possibility of looking at the problem of unconscious motivations in a somewhat more positive way: Emancipatory education can counteract the power of repressed needs by creating a non-oppressive environment. Likewise, it can erode the power of needs which have been recognized as "wrong" in a process of critical self-reflection, but which assert themselves against one's "better" judgment, by creating a context which nurtures different, more progressive needs and desires.

### THE MORALITY OF EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION

We have now arrived at an important juncture where some questions arise which neither Mezirow's nor Habermas' conceptual framework does justice to. Although Habermas' theory of communicative competence reveals the fundamentally communal structure of truth-seeking and norm-shaping and points to the ideal of power-free communication, his analyses move at a level of abstraction which leaves far behind the embedded and embodied reality of concrete individual learners. He posits the ideal both as a condition for and as an outcome of critical processes, but he leaves us with a rather bloodless version of community.

As Young points out, Habermas "retains a commitment to impartiality and reproduces in his theory of communication an opposition between reason and desire" (1988, p. 68). He contends that all interests have to be kept in abeyance except the willingness to come to a rational consensus about action-binding norms. This does not allow for the possibility of bringing a plurality of perspectives, needs, and interests which are context-bound, and which cannot be reduced to unity, into the discussion. Rather, rational discussion is possible only by abstracting from these motives and desires (Young, 1988). Habermas therefore "claims to theoretically recon-struct a presumption of impartiality implicitly carried by any discussion of norms that aims to reach consensus" (Young, 1988, p. 69).

Thus, Habermas' communicative ethics continues the strictly cognitive or "mentalist" tradition of a principle-based ethics. Underlying Habermas' theory of communicative action is a view of individual autonomy and of

"socialization without repression" which claims to transcend context, particularity, and cultural specificity, and where all aspects of individual and social life have become transparent and accessible to linguistic communication. Likewise, social intercourse is regulated by the rationality of critical insight, the force of evidence and of the better argument, which also build the foundation for explicit attempts of the members of a society to make moral decisions, or, in Habermas' words, to determine "generalizable interests" (1975). Instead of contextuality and specificity, Habermas' idea of a progressive rationalization of society along the lines of communicative rationality signifies "decentralization" and "differentiation" of social functions and processes, particularly the "universalization of norms and values, increasing cultural self-reflexivity, separation of communicative action from limiting normative contexts, individualization, and generalization of socialization patterns" (Schmidt-Waldherr, 1985, p. 52). These ideas reverberate in Mezirow's notion of a "superior" meaning perspective (1989, p. 171):

A superior perspective is more inclusive, discriminating and integrative of experience, is based on fuller information, is freer from coercion or distorting self-deception, more open to other perspectives and points of view, more accepting of others as equal participants in discourse, more rational in assessing contending arguments and evidence, more critically reflective and more willing to accept an informed and rational consensus as the authority for adjudicating conflicting validity claims.

Undoubtedly, such a progressive rationalization of social as well as educative processes is of vital importance in a world which seems to slip more and more into the irrationality of thoughtless destructiveness. However, its proposed exclusivity, its program of "total" communicative rationality and transparency neglects dimensions of human action and interaction which cannot be reduced to the "rational will" of acknowledging "no force except that of the better argument" (Habermas, 1975, p. 108), but which nevertheless contain important utopian potential.

These dimensions concern above all the life-affirming, positive force of the affectual or "libidinal" undercurrent of all human interaction, where the speakers do not abstract from the concreteness of their bodies. In Habermas' writings this force is exorcized in good rationalist-masculinist fashion. Consequently, Habermas also does not address the necessity of creating a moral environment which touches the deep structure of non-hierarchical, caring, and solidary relations and where the negative task of diagnosing and correcting distortions is complemented by the positive task of nurturing and practicing new virtues and of acquiring new ethical sensibilities for a social intercourse which is not based on the need to control or be controlled.

The new themes which are here proposed for a broadened understanding of emancipatory education are "context" and "relationality," themes which dominate the discussions of the emerging fields of feminist ethical theory

and feminist pedagogy. Contextuality here does not imply the limiting, distorting, and therefore regressive boundaries of the moral frameworks of "traditional societies," as Habermas (1984) would see them (although this aspect cannot be neglected). Rather, the focus is on the positive potential of these contexts of constituting a supportive moral ecology as a basis for nurturing important ethical sensibilities. Relationality or caring are among those primary ethical sensibilities which are attuned to context and particularity, and which involve reason as well as emotion, the mind as well as the body. Gilligan (1982) introduced the idea that relationality and caring involve forms of moral decision-making which are oriented towards preserving concrete, existing human relationships, and which are therefore fundamentally different from the emphasis of masculinist-rationalist ethical models on a correct application of ethical principles (see also Kittay & Meyers, 1987, for discussions of Gilligan's original position). In Tronto's words (1989, p. 176):

Caring suggests an alternative moral attitude. From perspectives of caring, what is important is not arriving at the fair decision, understood as how the abstract individual in this situation would want to be treated, but at meeting the needs of particular others or preserving the relationships of care that exist.

Recent theories of a feminist pedagogy have taken up the issue of caring as a basis for establishing solidary relations among the participants in an educational situation (see, for instance, the contributions in Culley & Portuges, 1985; Davis, 1985; and Belenky et al., 1986). These developing feminist pedagogies are based on feminist theory which constitutes a comprehensive critique of the destructive effect of power on all levels of individual and social existence (for a summary of feminist theory see Eisenstein, 1983). This is certainly one of the reasons that feminist pedagogies likewise try to address all these levels in their practical suggestions and to complement an enlightenment of the mind with an enlightenment of the heart. In these writings, a liberatory educational process is therefore conceived of in terms of fostering a theoretical consciousness which is capable of understanding and criticizing individual experience in the light of larger social forces, as well as in terms of bringing to life the richness of individual and social differences, thus producing a desire both to dwell in and appreciate and to transcend these differences in a process of *mutual* understanding. The fostering of solidary relations among all the participants in a context of caring is therefore as vital a component of an overall liberatory educational practice as the fostering of critical reflectivity. It is important to note that critical reflectivity has precisely the purpose to examine how under current social and political circumstances, "difference" always implies inequality, and that a positive acknowledgement of difference has to be inserted in a critique of the way inequality has shaped and determined many of the concrete manifestations of such difference (see Hart, in press).

In my own educational endeavors I have recently become more aware of the cultural or ecological sterility of an overemphasis on cognitive processes

and have become more attuned to the power of non-cognitive or non-linguistic aspects as contributing to *critical* abilities by subtly freeing the courage and the curiosity to know and understand. This, in my opinion, illustrates the strong motivational and emotional underside of critique which still awaits critical illumination by educational theory. Some beginnings have been made, however, in the related field of feminist epistemology (see, for instance, Jaggar, 1989).

## CONCLUSIONS

In light of the preceding discussion, the relationship between "critique, educational activity and social action" (Collard and Law, 1989, p. 105) appears somewhat differently than either Collard and Law or Mezirow present it.

First of all, emancipatory education is itself a form of social action which, as Mezirow correctly describes in detail, has as its purpose to draw attention to and to correct those distortions that manifest themselves in individually experienced patterns of thought and action. However, education is always inevitably caught in a tension between leading to new patterns of thought and action *via* the individual consciousness, and the fact that structures as well as content of individual consciousness are thoroughly permeated by society. I believe that Mezirow (1989, p. 172) undialectically severs this tension by setting up a false dichotomy between "indoctrination" (or an educator's intention "to effect a specific political action") and the educator's presumably less dogmatic role of "fostering critical reflection and action." As Mezirow points out, it is "*only*" a commitment to the latter that is permissible for the educator. One wonders, however, what is the moral or normative basis of such a commitment, what is the moral imperative of the ability to critically reflect, or what are the moral-practical prerequisites for such an ability if not the idea (and ideal) of dominance-free forms of human interaction? In addition, the preceding discussion calls into question Mezirow's implicit claim that the educator can be placed outside of a power-bound and therefore distorted relational context, as well as outside of practical attempts to not only criticize such a context but also to create a new and better one. I do not believe that the role of the educator can be that clear-cut, particularly not when power, and distorted forms of interaction and communication are placed at the center of one's educational program. As discussed in this essay, not only are individual as well as social dimensions of power intricately interrelated, they also enter the educational situation in forms of ideological values and beliefs, power-bound forms of interaction, and intrapsychic distortions affecting learners and educators alike. Furthermore, and consequently, to espouse a concept of emancipatory education binds one to the full range of its practical implications. It therefore signifies a fundamental commitment to struggle against the blinding and distorting effects of power in as many ways as are appropriate or possible, and a commitment to help create non-oppressive communities. I believe that



this commitment is of crucial importance in the process of shaping a theory of emancipatory education and of developing practices that issue from theoretical insights and from involvement in concrete practical experiences. This does not mean, however, that the educator has to dogmatically prescribe certain forms of action for the learners, nor does it mean that she can be somewhat "noncommittal" with respect to the learner's engagement in liberatory action. I fully agree with Mezirow that education may or may not lead an individual to engage in action, but this is, in a way, a deplorable failure of the individual to continue the work of enlightenment that may have begun in an explicitly educational situation, and such inaction may, over time, very well undo this beginning.

A commitment to the full range of practical possibilities to contradict and counteract power also does not signify that an educator always has to be a "political activist." Rather, it means that just like power knows no boundaries, our possibilities for action which is oriented towards the creation of power-free forms of interaction and human existence likewise do not allow for rigid boundaries separating education from social or political action. What forms of action are appropriate or viable, and what role the educator can play *qua* educator, depends on the specifics of social, historical, and institutional circumstances. I believe that many forms of emancipatory education are possible. Clearly, we need more theoreticians like Mezirow, but who represent other standpoints and experiences, to deepen and broaden our understanding of emancipatory education.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the following I will at times introduce some of Habermas' core concepts without giving complete references. I do this not only because these concepts appear throughout Habermas' writings in a variety of theoretical contexts, each time emphasizing different connotations or applications, but also because they have a strong evolutionary character. I will therefore cite sources where they are more explicitly dealt with or elaborated upon without meaning to indicate that these are the only places where they can be found. In volume one of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) the reader will find the latest version of Habermas' theory of communication, but earlier works are often more detailed with respect to one or the other aspect of this theory. For an excellent introduction to Habermas' constantly evolving theories see McCarthy's *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (1981).

<sup>2</sup> In *Technik und Wissenschaft als "Ideologie"* (Technology and Science as "Ideology," 1969, translated in Habermas, 1970c) Habermas draws the distinctions between "communicative" and "purposive-rational action" and corresponding modes of rationality. They appear as primary distinctions in most of his later writings. Purposive-rational action is further divided into "instrumental" and "strategic action" or rationality. Instrumental rationality refers to the rationality of means, requiring "technically utilizable, empirical knowledge"; strategic rationality refers to the rationality of decisions, requiring "the explication and inner consistency of value systems and decision maxims, as well as the correct derivation of acts of choice" (Habermas, 1979, p. 117). The precision of these distinctions is usually lost by simply contrasting "communicative" with "instrumental rationality."



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