Learning as Transformation

Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress

Jack Mezirow and Associates

Inequality, Development, and Connected Knowing

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Mezirow grapples with a major quest: facing us at the century's beginning: How can we develop adequate and reliable knowledge in a world that is changing at an ever-accelerating rate? As the speed and modes of communication increase, people from vastly different cultures cross paths in ways unimaginable one hundred years ago. In this world there are no fixed truths. As people enter new arenas their mental maps no longer chart the terrain they are trying to explore. Revised maps become outdated before the ink is dry (see Kegan, 1994).

Mezirow provides us with a means of coping. We must, he says, develop the capacity to reflect critically on the lenses we use to filter, engage, and interpret the world. When our old ways of meaning-making no longer suffice, it behooves us to engage with others in reflective discourse, assessing the assumptions and premises that guide our ways of constructing knowledge and revising those deemed inadequate. Reflective discourse develops best when participants are well informed, free from coercion, listen actively, have equal opportunities to participate, and take a critical stance toward established cultural norms or viewpoints. He points to university seminars as a model of discourse devoted to assessing and improving the ways we justify interpretations and beliefs.

This collaborative process of assessing and reformulating one's basic assumptions about the knowledge-making process permits
more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, and integrative ways of knowing the world. Reflective discourse and critical thinking thus provide the tool for continued intellectual and ethical development throughout adulthood, enabling participants to meet the challenges of a complex and changing society in creative ways. Transformative learning is an apt name for this highly evolved approach to knowledge making, as it enables continued growth and development. Mezirow's central insight is profound: we are all active constructors of knowledge who can become responsible for the procedures and assumptions that shape the way we make meaning out of our experiences.

Asymmetrical Relationships and Development

Although Mezirow's important theory provides an elegant, detailed description of one important endpoint of a long developmental process, it does not trace the many steps people take before they can "know what they know" in the highly elaborated form he describes. Imagining how the silenced and the young might be brought into full dialogue with others requires a detailed understanding of the growth over time of the meaning-making perspectives that shape the way people construct knowledge. A number of researchers have studied how these meaning-making structures evolve over the life span (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996; Bassiches, 1984; Kegan, 1982, 1994; King and Kitchener, 1994; Kuhn, 1996; Loevinger, 1976; Perry, 1970). Depicting a culminating meaning-making framework that has a good deal in common with Mezirow's, these researchers have also studied the many steps people take as they go about developing their capacities for reflective discourse.

Focusing narrowly on the endpoint of development as Mezirow does may be problematic for a theory that commands so much attention from adult educators. Unless it is understood that Mezirow's theory only depicts the culmination point, practitioners might overlook the reality of their students' lives. Most adults simply have not developed their capacities for articulating and criticizing the underlying assumptions of their own thinking, nor do they analyze the thinking of others in these ways. Furthermore, many have never had experience with the kinds of reflective discourse that Mezirow prescribes. This may be particularly true for adults returning to school relatively late in life. Many adult students delay their education because of traumatizing early school experiences. Many are the first in their family to seek further education. They often come from cultural communities that do not stress the kinds of values and activities associated with reflective discourse, especially its emphasis on developing and articulating ideas in a highly collaborative fashion. Many schools do not build such experiences into the curriculum.

Transformational theory also presumes relations of equality among participants in reflective discourse when, in actuality, most human relationships are asymmetrical. The university seminar, which Mezirow holds up as a model, is the result of a selection process that takes place over decades, leaving many by the wayside. Focusing on highly skilled mature thinkers, Mezirow does not concern himself with the problem of inequality. He writes in this volume: "Preconditions for realizing these values [of transformative learning] and finding one's voice for free full participation in discourse include elements of maturity, education, safety, health, economic security and emotional intelligence. Hungry, homeless, desperate, threatened, sick, frightened adults are less likely to be able to participate effectively in discourse to help us [sic] better understand the meaning of our own experiences."

Ignoring the problem of asymmetrical relationships has serious consequences. We fail to support many people in developing the full range of their potential. We do not struggle with injustice. We fail to harvest the knowledge that people (mostly women) have garnered while engaged in maternal practice in a democratic milieu: raising up the young in ways that will enable them to enter into positions of full and permanent equality with others in society (Greene,

We argue that discourse communities can include the immature and the marginalized. Participation in this kind of ongoing reflective dialogue would enable them (and us) better to understand the meaning of their experiences as well as the nature of the society they live in. Not only would participation and reflective dialogue support their development as individuals, it could also support the development of a more inclusive, just, and democratic society.

In this chapter we look closely at women’s ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1986; Goldberger, Tarule, Clinchy, and Belenky, 1996), a theory of development tracing the struggles of women to gain a voice and claim the powers of mind. We also draw on experiences of educational programs (Stanton, 1996) and community organizations (Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997) that are well designed to grapple with the problem of asymmetrical relationships. As a consequence, these programs have been highly successful in drawing out the voices and minds of marginalized peoples, enabling them to participate in reflective discourse communities and become more fully integrated into the social, economic, and political life of the whole society.

Dualistic Thinking and “Girl Stain”

When Enlightenment thinkers deemed all men to be created equal, they too ignored the reality of inequality, as had the classical Greeks before them (see, for instance, Martin, 1984; Noddings, 1984; and Okin, 1989). This is also true of activists who have actually tried to create deeply democratic communities. The kibbutz movement provides a striking example (Blasi, 1986). To realize their dream of living together in a highly democratic fashion, the movement’s founders had to invent the form, as the highly stratified and hierarchical institutions of those times provided few models for guidance. The early kibbutz members’ commitment to equality was taken so seriously and so literally that clothes were distributed to community members without any regard to body size!

The dilemma is a profound one. Equality should be proclaimed and ingrained. It should become the very bedrock of institutional life in any democracy. At the same time we must cultivate tools for dealing with the inequalities that exist and the new ones that are bound to rise.

Why do so many theorists take mature, independent thinkers as the subjects of their theories without any mention of how they got that way? Nel Noddings (1999), a feminist philosopher, argues that many people do not understand the processes involved in bringing people into maturity and relationships of equality. Lacking that knowledge, they assume that the process must be a dictatorial one. Thinkers who celebrate reason and disdain resorting to faith, tradition, and coercion ignore the problem of inequality because they reject authoritarian relationships.

We argue that people also find it difficult to think about asymmetrical relationships because the issue gets mired in dualistic thinking, that is, the persistent tendency of human beings to divide their experience into dichotomies or nonoverlapping categories of polar opposites (Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997). Male-female, thinking-feeling, and public-private are examples of interest here. Although polarities like public-private may seem complementary, they actually function as a hierarchy. One pole is prized; the other represents its opposite. One is sought; the other is avoided. In an “either/or” world the valued pole is regularly and profoundly identified with maleness. This pole sets the standard. It stands in opposition to its negative—the pole associated with femaleness. This hierarchy is communicated by the universal practice of uttering the value associated with maleness first. We say “male and female,” not “female and male.” The same is true of “mind and body,” “thinking and feeling,” “public and private,” “productive and reproductive,” “separate and connected,” and “big and little” (see Bakan, 1966; Basseches, 1984; Haste, 1994; Keller, 1985; Labouvrie-Vief, 1994; and Merchant, 1980).

In dichotomies the asymmetrical terms are either “unmarked” or “marked” (Bem, 1993). The positive pole remains unmarked. It
can denote the scale as a whole, with the marked term used to indicate the negative end of the continuum. "Good" and "bad" provide an example. "How good is Chris?" is a question that uses the unmarked term. It implies nothing about Chris's goodness. But if someone asked, "How bad is Chris?" we would assume that Chris is quite bad. Qualities at the negative pole are flagged so that it is easy to avoid any association with the negative.

Philosopher Helen Haste (1994) says that "metaphors of pollution" abound whenever hierarchical models cast qualities in terms of polarity, antithesis, and negation. Barrie Thorne (1993) observed many pollution metaphors while studying children's play, calling the phenomenon "girl stain." Boys are easily "contaminated" by any association with girls or girls' things and see any peer contaminated with girl stain as a lesser person. Girls, however, often rise in stature when they join boys' games, wear boys' clothes, or play with boys' playthings.

Things associated with males are "unmarked." Because masculinity is highly valued, one need not be poised to avoid being polluted. Feminine things are always "marked" so one can be on guard. Although the ideal of mankind includes women, men would feel polluted if they were seen as part of womankind. Many men avoid asymmetrical relationships and caring work because of their association with women.

To avoid the issue of inequality, Western thinkers divide the world into two separate arenas—the public and the private (Greene, 1988; Noddings, 1984). In all of the early democracies men (with property) entered the public arena as rational, autonomous individuals endowed with citizenship and a series of inalienable rights. Women, children, servants, slaves, and serfs were confined to the private world of the family. Their rights were limited or nonexistent.

The task of caring for dependent members of the family and the broader community was assigned to the women. Even though women were themselves a subordinated class of people with few rights, they worked to raise others up so they might enter into relation-

ships of full and permanent equality (Miller, 1976). In the process women garnered extensive knowledge about human development and the process of dissolving asymmetrical relationships. This knowledge has, however, remained largely ghettoized in the private world of the family. Many people do not even consider the kind of thinking that is useful for dealing with asymmetrical relationships to be either thought or knowledge. The same kind of polarized thinking that enabled the separation of the public from private life encourages people to conceptualize thinking and feeling as polar opposites (Haste, 1994). Any kind of practice that draws on one's emotional capacities, the subjective, and the particular—which good parenting always does—is simply not seen as involving thinking. Because women's capacity for thought was downplayed, it was assumed that women's caretaking was guided by maternal instincts, intuition, and mother's love but not by reflection and reason (Rudick, 1995).

**Articulating Women's Knowledge**

Simplistic, black-and-white categories may continue to shape the thinking of people long after they have they have developed far more complex habits of mind. In every area of life, the old dualistic categories and assumptions must be reevaluated and replaced with more integrative ways of thinking before they will lose their staying power. Needless to say, feminist thinkers have led the reexamination of the kinds of dualistic categories that shape the ways we have conceptualized men and women, public and private, thinking and feeling, speaking and listening. The feminist project has been primarily concerned with reclaiming those aspects of our humanity that were shunted aside because of "girl stain." In essence, feminist thinkers keep asking, "What is lost when only men and men's experiences are used to define the human experience? What is important about women and women's experiences for the humanity of both men and women?"
Philosopher Sara Ruddick (1995) confronted these issues head-on when she reconsidered the work of mothering. She argued that maternal work is a discipline. Like all other disciplines, it is associated with a body of knowledge, a philosophy, and a set of practices. Maternal thinking establishes criteria for determining failure and success, sets priorities, and identifies the virtues required by the discipline. Maternal thinking is one kind of disciplined reflection among many, each with identifying questions, methods, and aims. It is, Ruddick says, “a revolutionary discourse” that has been silenced. Women have had to struggle to make their own viewpoint heard, even to themselves.

The Ethic of Care

Carol Gilligan (1982, 1993) uncovered a good deal of this discourse when interviewing women about a serious moral dilemma they were actually confronting. When Gilligan tried to place the women’s reasoning on Lawrence Kohlberg’s (1984) map of moral development, she found the map inadequate for characterizing women’s experience. Kohlberg had constructed this important theory from extensive interviews with boys and men trying to resolve a series of hypothetical moral dilemmas. Like most researchers of his time, Kohlberg studied only men but generalized his findings to all humans.

To capture the considerations she had been hearing in the women’s voice, Gilligan described what she called “the ethic of care” or “the response mode” to moral conflicts. In this mode conflicts are resolved through dialogue, as illustrated by this response to one of Kohlberg’s hypothetical moral dilemmas: “Should Heinz steal some medicine to save the life of his dying wife? The druggist is charging an exorbitant price and won’t let the husband defer payments.” Should Heinz steal the drug for his wife? “I don’t know. Maybe he could talk with the druggist. They might be able to work something out. Why is the druggist charging such an outrageous amount? Maybe his wife is also dying. Heinz should also talk with his wife. What does she want? What is her condition? Maybe her life will be terribly impaired if she were to survive. Who would take care of their children if she died and he was in jail?”

In this mode, questioning, listening, and responding to everyone’s concerns is seen as the way to bring about lasting and satisfying solutions to moral predicaments. Resolutions are reached through conversation, storytelling, and perspective sharing. One works especially hard to understand and present the perspective of those who are incapable of articulating their own thoughts well. This approach is questioning rather than assertive. Decisions are always changing because people and circumstances keep changing. All these themes will reappear when we discuss how educators and public leaders empower people to become articulate, reflective constructors of knowledge.

Gilligan compares the ethic of care with the notions of morality that Kohlberg found in the male voice. She calls the orientation he depicted “the ethic of justice” or “the rights mode.” Here moral conflicts are resolved through the lone individual’s impartial application of rules and principles whose hierarchy can be determined logically. An example: “Yes, it would be right for a man to steal [the outrageously priced medicine] if that was the only way he could save the life of his wife—or indeed, the life of anyone including a stranger. Logically the right to life must take precedence over property rights. Property can have no value unless human life is protected.” In the rights mode everyone is to be treated equally and impartially. The central metaphor suggesting this approach is “Justice” standing blindfolded on a pedestal.

If everyone is really quite equal it is reasonable to formulate a body of principles based on commonalities. But in caring for those who are immature, impaired, or who have other vulnerabilities, one has to think and act on the level of the particular and the individual (Schweickart, 1996).

Needless to say, moral decisions made in the rights mode appear clear and certain whereas those in the response mode seem weak and indecisive. Although the rights mode provides principles for
autonomous decision making, the responsibility mode outlines the methodology that draws everyone into the decision-making process. The rights mode emphasizes speaking; the response mode stresses listening. Nurturing the development of immature and subordinated peoples requires a profound openness to dialogue and connection rather than monologue, exhortation, and distance. Articulating what she heard in the women’s voice, Gilligan was able to describe aspects of moral thought of great importance to both men and women. It was, however, thinking that had been muted and hard to hear in studies that looked only at men and men’s experiences.

Women’s Ways of Knowing

Another interview study, Women’s Ways of Knowing (WWK), revealed similar themes (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996). Following Gilligan’s lead, WWK wondered if the inclusion of the women’s voice might expand and elaborate another important developmental theory constructed out of data from males: William Perry’s (1970) theory devised after interviewing college students each spring about how their thinking had changed during the past year. Perry’s scheme showed students outgrowing the simplistic dualisms that once led them to see the world as sharply divided between “Authority/Right/We” and “Illegitimate/Wrong/Other.” Perry’s work seemed especially important to the WWK collective because black-and-white dualistic thinking undergirds authoritarianism and many other forms of prejudice besides sexism (see, for instance, Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford, 1950; Allport, 1958; Brown, 1965).

The collaborative conducted extensive interviews with 130 women from all walks of life. Each woman was asked to describe how she herself goes about getting knowledge and ideas. What had helped her gain a voice and develop the powers of mind? What had held her back? As the collaborative read and reread the verbatim interview transcriptions, they kept questions in the backs of their minds:

- How does this woman get her ideas? How does she think authorities get their ideas?
- Does this woman see truth and knowledge as something that can be discussed and passed from one person to another?
- Does she listen to her own inner voice, understanding that insight and truth can spring up from her own mind?
- Does she try to enter into another person’s frame of mind, see the world as he or she sees it—even if the other person is coming from a very different place?
- Does she try to develop, test, and assess ideas? Can she follow a line of reasoning, looking for flaws of logic, looking for errors of omission? Does she take a critical stance with her own ideas? With those of peers? And those of authorities?
- Does she play “midwife,” helping others give birth to new ideas? Does she ask good questions to draw out people’s thinking? Does she try to understand what someone is thinking even when the person has not found the words needed to articulate the ideas well? Does she look for the strengths rather than the flaws in the lines of reasoning that others are developing? Does she document fledgling ideas so people can better see their creations in the making?

The research collaborative tried to place what the women said on Perry’s map of development. Like Gilligan, they tried to be particularly aware when they had to push and shove to fit the women’s thinking into the established scheme. Although Perry had described much of the women’s experience quite beautifully, it became clear
I felt kind of dumb, very, very. 'Cause for when I went to school, I was picked on for, [sigh] I don't know how long. . . . I felt dumb when I'd talk. You know, if I'd say something, it just didn't come out right. It just didn't sound right, and I felt like, oh, Susan, get out of here. . . . THINK ABOUT THE TIMES WHEN YOU ARE TRYING TO UNDERSTAND SOMETHING NEW.
HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT IT? Well, I can cut hair but nobody's ever taught me. . . . I can knit, I can make slippers, and I don't even know how to do it. I couldn't even tell somebody how to do it because I don't even know how to do it myself. BUT YOU DO IT. Right. Well, um, I know how I do it but I couldn't tell you right now how to do it. You would have to watch me [Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997, pp. 141–142].

Invariably, Silenced women like Susan grew up in the midst of great violence. They were used to using words as weapons rather than as a means for passing meanings back and forth between people. The Silenced do not have the tools they need for participating in the kind of discourse community Mezirow describes. To bring them into an ongoing dialogue requires the creation of an extremely safe and caring community where people draw each other out and listen to one another with the greatest of care. That experience can be profoundly transformative (see Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997).

Received Knowers describes people who can and do understand things when they are explained. They learn by listening to those who know and remembering what they have to say. People who hold this outlook are not aware that they themselves can generate ideas of their own. Indeed, they do not even realize that the authorities develop knowledge. They simply assume that authorities get knowledge by listening to other authorities. Needless to say, these women are quite dependent on others for both knowledge and direction. Rachel explains how she gets ideas:

"Silenced" describes an outlook that is unlike anything Perry saw among the college students he interviewed. Although Silenced women might see themselves learning from their own concrete actions, they do not believe themselves capable of learning from experiences mediated by language. Unable to give words to what they know, these women think of themselves as voiceless. They also find it difficult to acquire new understandings by listening to what others might have to say. Feeling incapable of both hearing and speaking, these women live profoundly isolated lives. A woman we call Susan provides an example (in the excerpts that follow, sentences in all-capital letters are the interviewer's prompts of the interviewees):

4In Women's Ways of Knowing this outlook was named "Silence." We have taken the liberty of changing the name to "Silenced." The added "d" helps distinguish this way of knowing from the approaches others have observed in some non-Western cultures (Goldberger, 1996; Schweickart, 1996). Here silence is associated with powerful modes of connecting with and apprehending the world that do not depend on language.
Well, I can understand things if somebody explains it to me. I know I can do good in school. . . . The work and stuff I always understood. . . . WOULD YOU COMMENT ON THIS STATEMENT MADE BY ANOTHER WOMAN: I LIKE TEACHERS WHO DRAW OUT YOUR IDEAS—TEACHERS WHO GET YOU ALL TOGETHER WORKING OUT YOUR PROBLEMS AND PROJECTS, FINDING YOUR OWN ANSWERS. I don’t think that’s right. No. The teacher should be teaching you how to—what: to learn and stuff. How can you learn on your own? You have to have somebody teaching you. . . . The teachers have, you know, been to school and stuff—whereas they know how to teach it [Belenky, Bond, and Weinstein, 1997, p. 144].

Like Perry’s Dualists, the categories that Received Knowers use for organizing their thinking about the world are cast in highly dichotomous terms. Things are either true or false, black or white. These women see truth spelled with a capital “T.” Mezirow’s idea of critically examining the assumptions used by authorities and others would baffle a Received Knower like Rachel. Who is she to question authority? Why would anyone think their ideas could be wrong? Many Received Knowers have even been taught that it is immoral to question authority.

Subjective Knowledge describes the outlook held by adults who are aware that they themselves can give birth to ideas of their own. They listen to their inner voice, articulate their own thoughts, and criticize their former dependence on authorities for knowledge and direction. Locating the source of knowledge, standards, and authority within the self is very liberating, often resulting in an explosion of energy. A woman we call Molly gives the flavor of this outlook:

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF AS A KNOWER? My sister-in-law says I have a mind of my

own. I might talk to her about my problems, just to talk about it, but I don’t go looking for answers from anybody else, ’cause I have to get them from myself, in order for me to be happy. . . . WHEN YOU AND OTHERS DISAGREE, HOW DO YOU KNOW WHO IS RIGHT? Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. Who’s to say one is better than another? CAN YOU SAY SOME ANSWERS OR OPINIONS ARE EVER BETTER THAN OTHERS? Who’s to say what’s wrong and what’s right anyway? It’s what you believe and think. I mean, there are so many different kinds of people! [unpublished data].

Received Knowers think there is only one truth; Subjective Knowers believe there are as many truths as there are people. They see their personal point of view as unique and precious. One’s truth should not be compared or judged. It is the only truth that matters. Having previously been so susceptible to the standards and critiques promulgated by others, Subjective Knowers reject Mezirow’s notion that one should take a critical, evaluating stance toward ideas.

Subjective Knowers also reject the notion, so central to Received Knowing, that truth can be embodied in words. To them ideas are so unique that it is not possible to capture their essence with words. Words diminish and distort insights and intuitions. This distrust of language, combined with their intense preoccupation with exploring their own inner world, makes it hard for Subjective Knowers to listen to others and see the world through their eyes. With such a jaundiced view of both authorities and language, students who hold this outlook may even see libraries as irrelevant.

Without special coaching, people who hold this outlook would also have a difficult time understanding the notion of reflective discourse and critical thinking. Even though they are aware that they and others have ideas, insights, and intuition, they have not developed the capacity to stand back and reflect on their ideas. Not engaging in meta-thinking, they “are” their ideas rather than people who
have" ideas (Kegan, 1994). To them, taking a critical stance toward ideas threatens an erasure of self.

Procedural Knowledge provides the essential tools people must have if they are to participate in a highly reflective dialogue. With this perspective it is understood that ideas can be communicated, analyzed, developed, and tested by making good use of procedures. Two markedly different modes were identified: the "separate" and "connected" approaches to Procedural Knowing (see also Clinchy, 1996, 1998).

"The believing game" and "doubting game" are metaphors that suggest the key differences between these two different modes (Elbow, 1973). Separate Knowers play the doubting game. They are always standing back, following a line of reasoning, looking for flaws in logic and errors of omission (Elbow, 1973; Clinchy, 1996; Moulton, 1983). A classic example: "I never take anything someone says for granted. I just tend to see the contrary. I like playing the devil's advocate, arguing the opposite of what somebody's saying, thinking of exceptions, or thinking of a different train of logic" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996, p. 10C).

An argument that survives this kind of scrutiny is thought to be better or more "defensible" than one that does not. Mezirow captures the spirit of Separate Knowing well in Chapter One when he describes Habermas's theory of communicative learning:

Understanding in communicative learning requires that we assess the intentions behind the words; the coherence, truth, and appropriateness of what is being communicated; the truthfulness and qualifications of the speaker; and the authenticity of expressions of feeling. That is, we must become critically reflective of the assumptions of the person communicating. . . . In communicative learning, we determine the justification of a problematic belief or understanding through rational discourse to arrive at a tentative best judgment. The only

alternatives to discourse for justifying a belief is to appeal to tradition, authority, or force.

The goal of communicative learning (or Separate Knowing), as Mezirow makes very clear, is not winning an argument for argument's sake or proving that one is smart, worthy, or wise. The goal is to achieve consensus about the best judgment the discourse community is capable of reaching with the information currently available. Mezirow places this kind of critical thinking at the heart of transformative learning, as it provides the tools for analyzing the weaknesses in current arguments and points the way toward more adequate conceptualizations. As such, it provides many of the tools one needs for continued development, but not all.

Connected Knowing provides another set of procedures for developing and testing ideas, but it takes a radically different stance. People who take this approach play the believing game. They look for strengths, not weaknesses, in another's argument. If a weakness is perceived they struggle to understand why someone might think that way. An example: "When I have an idea about something, and it differs from the way another person is thinking about it, I'll usually try to look at it from that person's point of view, see how they could say that, why they would think they are right, why it makes sense to them" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, 1996, p. 100).

The more Connected Knowers disagree with another person the harder they will try to understand how that person could imagine such a thing, using empathy, imagination, and storytelling as tools for entering into another's frame of mind. We call them Connected Knowers because they actually try to enter into the other person's perspective, adopting their frame of mind, trying to see the world through their eyes. Striving to get the big picture, they try to see things holistically, not analytically. As Noddings (1984, p. 30) describes the process: "I set aside my temptation to analyze and to plan. I do not project; I receive the other into myself, and I see and feel with the other. I become a duality. I am not thus caused to see
or to feel... for I am committed to the receptivity that permits me to see and to feel in this way. The seeing and feeling are mine, but only partly and temporarily mine, as on loan to me."

Even though Connected Knowers might understand full well that a person’s point of view is partial and inadequate, they suspend judgment when they are struggling to understand another person’s point of view. They worry that marshaling counterarguments would impair their ability to understand what the other person is really trying to say. It is too difficult to embrace another’s perspective fully while trying to dismantle their ideas. They also worry that counterarguments might freeze the minds of people who are trying hard to gather and develop their thoughts. Mezirow resonates with these concerns when he argues for withholding judgment while trying to understand a point of view that is very different from one’s own. Once the other’s point of view is understood and appreciated, however, Mezirow stresses the importance of analyzing the logic and determining which line of reasoning is the best. Needless to say, standing back and taking a critical stance to ideas can be proper and welcome; it can also be inappropriate and even, in some circumstances, destructive.

Connected Knowers have no qualms about playing the doubting game as long as it is played on a level playing field. Separate Knowing, with all of its doubting, can harm those who lack confidence in their abilities to develop and articulate ideas. When the germ of an idea is just beginning to develop, doubting can bring about stillbirths even for the most accomplished thinkers.

Groups that place Connected Knowing at the center of their practice can achieve an unusually high degree of creativity and solid intellectual work. The believing game encourages listening. People work hard to understand each other. They learn of each other’s stories, visions, and goals. They help each other push pet projects along. In these highly collaborative, creative learning communities, unusual ideas are often explored and developed with zest and success. In competitive communities that overemphasize Separate Knowing, thinking can become quite stagnant. Too many new ideas are shot down before they have a chance to become airborne.

People often have a hard time recognizing Connected Knowing as a procedural approach to knowledge making. No doubt the dualistic categories that separate thought from feeling make it difficult for people to honor an approach to thinking that embraces personal experiences, feelings, and narrative over abstract conceptualizations. In a culture that perceives competition—not collaboration—as the great animator, it makes sense that taking a “critical stance” and determining “the very best” argument would become the procedure of choice.

That procedure, however, effectively shuts out immature or marginalized people. Critical discourse, the doubting game, can only be played well on a level playing field. The believing game, in contrast, is a game for everyone no matter how immature or silenced. Connected Knowing creates a level playing field where even very dissimilar people can meet as equals. Joyce provides a good example when she describes her relationship with her four-year-old son, Peter:

Well you know [Peter’s] got such an active mind... He is always trying to figure out how things tick... If I ask him to do something... he’s always asking, “Why?” He really wants to understand what’s the goal—what’s the purpose—how come?... He’s real interested in figuring out how one thing leads to another. It’s great, because sometimes he helps me realize that I haven’t really thought through why I’m saying what I am. And so we do think it through. WHAT DO YOU MEAN? I mean, he gets me to think it through—with him, you know. He asks me “Why?” and I realize we got to think it through together, because I don’t really know why I told him to do what I did. I mean, I have a feeling why, but I’m not really sure about it, so Peter and I talk about some reasons why he should or shouldn’t do what I asked and we
think through what really makes sense. It's really useful sometimes, you know? [Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997, p. 130]

If Joyce had embraced Mezirow’s procedures and regularly ranked her own and her young son’s arguments to determine “the best tentative judgment,” most certainly the child would be found wanting and become discouraged. It is likely that Joyce’s very willingness to kneel down and place herself on her child’s level will make it easier in the long run for Peter to learn how to take a take a critical stance toward authorities and the status quo.

Constructed Knowledge is a perspective held by people, like Joyce, who see themselves and everyone else—even the smallest child—as active constructors of knowledge. Constructivists understand that knowledge is constructed by the mind and not by procedures, however useful procedures might be. Because they see the knower as such an integral part of the known, people who work out of this perspective do a lot of meta-thunking: they evaluate, choose, and integrate the wide range of procedures and processes they bring to the meaning-making process.

Constructivist Knowers actively cultivate the whole range of approaches. They learn from concrete experience as with the Silenced; they learn by listening to others as with Received Knowers; they learn from experience, intuition, feelings, and insights as with Subjective Knowers; and they learn from both the Separate and Connected approaches to Procedural Knowing. They stand back, question, take apart, and criticize points of views they see as partial, unfair, and/or destructive. They also move inward, see the whole, listen, understand, integrate, build up, and create.

Constructivists have thrown aside the dichotomies that privilege men over women, speaking over listening, thinking over feeling, doubting over believing, and public over private. The dethroning of dualism can also be seen by tracing the ways authorities are conceptualized by people with different ways of knowing. Received

Knowers think of an authority as a superior person while they themselves are inferior—that is, the master and the subservient. Here the inequality and distance between authorities and nonauthorities is vast and unbridgeable. Subjective Knowers stand the hierarchy on its head. By casting themselves as the only relevant authority, they place themselves above and beyond others—even those with great expertise. Procedural Knowing is the first position where the knowers see themselves and authorities carrying on a dialogue as equals. The Separate Knower stands back, looks for flaws in the authority’s logic, and presents alternative arguments for consideration. The Connected Knower steps forward, enters into the authority’s perspective, and tries to see the world through his or her eyes. Both procedures require the knower and the authority to situate themselves at the same level.

Many find it a pleasure to see the self on the same plane as an authority but find it exceedingly difficult to place the self on the level of someone who could be considered as lesser. Anyone who worries about “girl stain” might not want to lower himself or herself to meet a child, eye to eye, in the way Joyce encounters her son, Peter. With the achievement of both Separate and Connected Knowing, however, one has the ability to stand on a level playing field with everyone in society, from the newly born to the wisest of elders.

It is clear that transformative learning—that is, the capacity for reflective discourse, critical thinking, and evaluating one’s basic assumptions and meaning-making frameworks, as described by Mezirow—places Separate Knowing in a central role in the construction of new knowledge and adult transformations. It seems equally clear that there are other processes that are equally vital but less well described in this body of work.

**Midwife-Teachers**

We turn now to practice, specifically in higher education. How can these concepts be put into play and with what results?
The WWK perspectives are ideal types—the equivalent of snapshots of an ongoing developmental process. They are a convenient way of conveying in general terms how the developing person is apprehending truth, herself as a knower, relationships, conflicts, and learning opportunities. They provide a road map that can help us see where people are coming from and where they might be trying to go—at least in a culture like ours. Having snapshots and a map is of great practical use for educators intent on nurturing students' development.

Also important is a conscious strategy for dealing with inequalities of power and epistemological development in the classroom. A large body of work critically analyzes the power relationships inherent in educational practice (for example, Freire, 1985; Giroux, 1992) with feminist thinkers in particular reminding us of the importance of attending to the particular, the personal, and the contextual (Collins, 1991; Maher and Tetreault, 1994; Mitchell, 1996; Weiler, 1991). Women's Way of Knowing coined the term "midwife-teacher" to describe educators who see their students as active constructors of knowledge and work hard to draw out their best thinking:

Midwife-teachers do not administer anesthesia. They support their students' thinking, but they do not do the students' thinking for them or expect the students to think as they do... The midwife-teacher's first concern is to preserve the student's fragile newborn thoughts, to see that they are born with their truth intact, that they do not turn into acceptable lies... The cycle is one of confirmation-evocation-confirmation. Midwife-teachers help students deliver their words to the world, and they use their own knowledge to put the students into conversation with other voices—past and present—in the culture [Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule, pp. 217–219].

Such teachers, of course, share a great deal in common with the ideal teacher described in the adult education literature, emphasizing the students' strengths, incorporating their experiences, deemphasizing competition and hierarchy in the classroom (for example, Mezirow, 1990; Brookfield, 1996). However, adult educators often do not attend to the epistemological assumptions that shape their students' meaning-making efforts. Seeking this kind of understanding encourages teachers to take a "believing" stance toward students who otherwise might be perceived as resistant, passive, intellectually lazy, or illogical. The task becomes one of discerning the students' basis for thinking as they do and finding ways to affirm what and how they know, as well as finding the means to challenge and stimulate them to develop more elaborate approaches to the construction of knowledge.

In recent years adult educators have worked hard to dethrone "the sage on the stage" in favor of "the guide on the side" (Daloz, 1999). We think the guides can profit from developmental maps emphasizing not only the ultimate destination but the landmarks along the way. Working from the WWK map, for example, and understanding the distinction between Subjective Knowing and Connected Knowing help a teacher to conduct a classroom discussion differently. A "Subjective" discussion would encourage students to air their opinions or relate their experiences in an atmosphere of nonjudgmentalness. While maintaining an aura of careful listening and acceptance, a "Connected" discussion would go beyond that, pointing out where opinions are different, helping participants uncover the sources of and reasons for the differences, exploring the implications of each position, and asking the class to reconcile different opinions. The Connected mode supports everyone to listen deeply and respectfully and models how to draw out others' ideas. Received Knowers are challenged to attend to classmates' ideas and to formulate and voice their own opinions. Subjective Knowers are challenged to stand back and look at their own
ideas amidst an array of others and to subject all ideas to similar questioning. Procedural Knowers are challenged to integrate and synthesize ideas and to practice the use of both separate and connected modes. Attending to such a variety of perspectives requires teachers who are fast on their epistemological feet, observing, drawing out, summarizing, working many levels at once.

Sharing such "maps of development" with students enables teachers and students to discuss and arrive at common understandings about the process, not just the content, of learning. A map can help students see and track the growth of their capacities for reflective discourse. For example, psychologist Paul Hettich (1990) taught his students Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives and Perry's theory of intellectual and ethical development. Student journals, originally assigned so that students could use personal experience to make theoretical topics more relevant to their lives, were stretched into exercises in meta-analysis. The students evaluated their own journal entries according to Bloom's or Perry's theoretical categories. They reported that these evaluation efforts made them aware of their own levels of thinking, stimulated more critical thinking, and helped them understand other course concepts.

Neither Bloom nor Perry included Connected Knowing in their schemes. Ann Stanton (1993) worked to create a learning community where students were encouraged to engage in Connected Knowing: developing skills, studying theories, and sharing their stories of finding a voice and feeling the power of their minds. Three minicourses taught WWK perspectives and Kolb Learning Styles, providing experience in their use through weekly small-group sessions over a period of five or six weeks. Active listening and engaging in dialogue were modeled and emphasized throughout. Pre- and posttests found that participants in the minicourses gained significantly more on WWK perspectives compared to those in control groups. A sophomore in college we call Amy responds to the question, How is the way you see yourself now different than the way you saw yourself a year or so ago? "I remember being in tears and saying, 'I can't seem to get a grip on what I'm trying to pull off here.' Now I see myself as much more confident, much more capable. I know more; I can articulate more. I feel like I'm balancing two ways of thinking—[I think more] creatively and analytically. I haven't mastered it but I'm close to mastering it. I clearly see these amazing spurts of growth" (Stanton, 1993, p. 38).

Connected Knowing and developmental theory come together most powerfully when the students are deeply understood and teachers can tailor questions and responses to push students' thinking forward. When the reflective dialogue takes place in writing, the whole process slows down. Ideas can be framed with great care, with the writer able to stand back and reflect on her own thinking. The reader can come back to the writing again and again to refresh and deepen understanding. A university student describes her experience in a large lecture course (about ninety students) on religion: "[The professor] is an enthralling lecturer, but even better she writes letters. Every two weeks or so she writes a letter to each student in the class, and we write back. She pushes me to ask deeper questions and to see things from many different perspectives. It's been the most powerful learning experience I've ever had" (Stanton, 1999).

Chemistry professor Michael Strauss (1995) places student letters at the center of everyone's learning. Students in a large class write him anonymous letters that contain questions, concerns, interpretations, and student breakthroughs: "Wow, I've got it, there are seven carbons in the longest chain!" Strauss makes these letters into transparencies and uses the next lecture hour to discuss and elaborate on the letters, noting, "Such writing expresses the students' own concerns about the chemistry, in their own language, about what they really want to know. And often the writing itself leads to insights for the writer, which I then share with all the students... [They] can see this—the process, the insights, and the content" (p. 9). Strauss's pedagogy embodies such Connected Knowing concepts as meeting students where they are, drawing out their ideas, listening with care, and honoring process.
Careful attention to both process and content and centering education on what students want to know are key elements of undergraduate education at Vermont College’s Adult Degree Program (Hathaway, 1999), whose design drew on the theories of John Dewey (1966) and such models of progressive education as Myles Heron’s (1990) Highlander Center for Research and Education. Written reflective dialogue between student and faculty is its centerpiece. The program operates on a low-residency model where the larger educational community (students and faculty advisors) comes together for brief but intense residencies, followed by the students returning to their families and jobs and working at a distance on independent studies in collaboration with a faculty advisor. Their work together takes the form of critical book reviews, essays, and “vigorous dialogue” through long letters about the process and contents of the study. This format allows for intense intellectual relationships, where faculty can be attuned precisely to students’ thinking and development (Stanton, 1999). Sarah Mitchell (1996) documents teachers’ use of Connected Knowing—openness to dialogue and connection, drawing out students’ thinking, documenting their strengths and fledgling ideas—in the written exchanges, leading to students experiencing profound transformations. As one student expressed this, “At first I was in a panic about the work and worried this panic would be insurmountable. It was such a miracle to me that I had someone out there who could hold the vision for me that I could do this work. I can hold that vision for myself now. I am beginning to know what I am capable of doing and being and many of the barriers have given way to trust in my intelligence and my voice.”

Midwife-Leaders

Educational institutions are not the only social institutions that regularly sponsor the development of voice and mind among adults. A study of four community organizations with long histories of bringing people from the margins into voice revealed a group of community leaders who shared a vision of an inclusive, caring society and held a passionate belief in the capacity of people to lead themselves (Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997). As public leaders, these women had all reflected deeply on the issue of gender. After an extensive reexamination of traditional gender roles, they rejected some of the conventions and reinterpreted others. Each embraced, with renewed passion, those aspects of traditional gender roles that charge women with the responsibility of supporting the development of the most vulnerable members of society. In their minds, a proper leader “draws out” and “draws in” the missing voices. Like midwife-teachers, midwife-leaders valued, practiced, and taught the skills involved in Connected Knowing.

The root metaphor for describing what midwife-leaders actually do is “raising up” not “ruling over.” Although conventionally oriented leaders stand at the helm, gathering followers and leading the way, these leaders stand in the background and push others to the fore. Their effectiveness at drawing out the potential of people earns them the right to be called midwife-leaders.

Sponsoring the development of the most vulnerable members of society, these women bring knowledge, values, and practices to public life that are usually associated with private life. These leaders draw on certain skills and values associated with women’s traditional roles, and all would agree that this form of leadership—like midwife teaching—should be cultivated by men and women alike.

Even though these leaders and their organizations serve different cultural communities and social classes, they have much in common. A leisurely, highly reflective conversation is probably the most salient of the commonalities. Each organization has customs, rules, and rituals that allow these kinds of conversations to happen regularly. Whenever a voice is missing, someone notices and begins the drawing-out process.

All of these organizations have created a caring community where people feel deeply connected to one another. The depth of
these connections is suggested by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). Again and again women would say, “We’re like a family.” When asked how ordinary neighborhood women can build so many complex programs in a deteriorating area of an inner city, one leader says, “We are like a family; we have made a lifelong commitment to each other. People who know they’re going to be together over the long haul can take on something that might take ten years or more to accomplish” (Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock, 1997, pp. 259–260). These organizations have dissolved the barriers between public and private life so successfully we think of them as “public homeplaces.”

Connected Knowing is widely practiced in all of these organizations. People work hard to understand one another. They look for and document one another’s strengths. They hold up mirrors for one another that are specifically focused on dreams, accomplishments, critiques of old ways, struggles, and new plans. They focus on the “growing edge,” or that which is struggling to be born. Seeing such reflections, everyone can articulate the goals more clearly, understand better the foundations already in place that they can build upon, and find companions who want to travel similar paths.

All of these organizations find ways of taking the dialogue into the broader community. Some put their reflections and stories into videos that can be shared and discussed with others. The African American cultural workers take the people’s stories and weave them into new songs and dramas. The musical and theatrical productions become public events, bringing the voices of the excluded into public discourse. Others see themselves as historians, keeping track of women’s contributions to the neighborhood. When the neighborhood women tried to claim they were not leaders, there were numerous and detailed histories of the leadership roles the women had actually undertaken. In these ways the women provided one another with mirrors that allowed them to see themselves in an astonishing new light. Realizing how the story of women’s leadership was left out of the official history of the community, the women began fighting to get the whole story told. In the process of “doing” history, the women found themselves “making” history.

These organizations are like community think tanks that take a problem-solving approach and generate one action project after another. The women are always asking, What is the problem here? What should be changed? What are our dreams for this community? How can we move forward? They then develop plans and carry them out. After a project is launched, women step back and ask even more questions: What did we hope to do? What did we actually do? What did we accomplish? What were the strengths and the weaknesses in our analyses, plans, and processes? What needs to be done now? Before long they are back at the drawing board. People develop their skills for critical thinking and separate knowing in the context of action projects. Combining the practices of dialogue, building on strengths, a problem-solving approach, and a commitment to action unleashes the developmental processes that transform individuals and their communities.

Developing the capacity for critical thinking or Separate Knowing as well as the skills of Connected Knowing is of the utmost importance for people who have been excluded and silenced. The ability to question authorities, tradition, and basic assumptions is especially important to those who have been treated unjustly. Paulo Freire (1970) makes that abundantly clear. These capacities develop most fully in communities where every voice gets heard, where people’s stories are listened to with great care, and where their visions, struggles, and strengths are well documented. This enables groups to take their critiques forward, forge common goals, and engage in action projects that have the potential of transforming whole communities as well as the people involved.

Even if his theory does not articulate elements we believe are central to the form, our experience of Mezirow’s practice—attending the conference that gave birth to this volume—convinces us that he is a gifted midwife-teacher and leader who has helped give birth to a vibrant community of learners. Major emphasis was placed on participating, processing, and discussing the presentations. All conference attendees were welcomed around the table on an equal basis; all were encouraged to build on speakers’ ideas. The collegial
and collaborative nature of the discussions was different from anything we had experienced previously in conferences held in university settings. The evening event, a moving and emotional tribute to Paulo Freire, further illustrated how this learning community has broken through such dualisms as thought and action, theory and practice, thinking and emotion.

References


Learning as Transformation

Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress

Jack Mezirow and Associates

JOSSEY-BASS
A Wiley Company
www.josseybass.com

2000
## Positions of Intellectual Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generic Position</th>
<th>&quot;Forms&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Ways&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Epistemological Reflection&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red</strong></td>
<td>Dualism</td>
<td>Received Knowing</td>
<td>Absolute Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;No Voice&quot; ... &quot;Radio Voice&quot; ... &quot;Oppositional Voice&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yellow</strong></td>
<td>Multiplicity</td>
<td>Subjective Knowing</td>
<td>Transitional Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Own Voice&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>One opinion is as good as another</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td>Contextual Relativism</td>
<td>Procedural Knowing</td>
<td>Contextual Knowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separate ... Connected</td>
<td>&quot;Speak in measured tones&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green</strong></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Constructed Knowing</td>
<td>[Note: Positions shown in color typically not observed in university students]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Functions as a &quot;mosaic&quot; of other positions in contextually appropriate ways</td>
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*Table developed by Robert Grossman (Psychology), Paul Olexia (Biology), and Paul Sotheralnd (Biology) at Kalamazoo College.*
# Individual Differences and How Students Think

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION</th>
<th>ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT KNOWLEDGE AND VALUES</th>
<th>ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOU AS AN INSTRUCTOR (LOCUS OF RESPONSIBILITY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge is absolute. Right and Wrong answers exist for everything, are known, and delivered by Authority. Knowledge is a collection of information.</td>
<td>Instructor is the Authority and source of knowledge. Right answers are expected. If simple Right answers are not given, you are considered incompetent. (EXTERNAL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yellow</strong></td>
<td>In some specialized areas we still have certainty, but in most areas we really don’t know everything for sure, where all opinions can be just as valid or invalid as all others. Hence - “anything goes”, or “which way do they want us to think (to get a good grade)?” prevail.</td>
<td>Because nothing is known for sure and your opinion is just one among many, knowing how to get through the system is at least fair to expect from the instructor. Instructor is a source of the Correct Way. Also, “What right do you have to grade me?” exists. (EXTERNAL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blue</strong></td>
<td>All knowledge is contextual. However, “right and wrong”, “adequate and inadequate”, “appropriate and inappropriate” can exist within a specific context and are judged by “rules of adequacy” that are determined by expertise and good thought processes.</td>
<td>Instructor is a source of earned expertise and must explain the “rules of the game”. Help students learn to use these rules to evaluate opinions and ideas. Mutuality of learning is sought in the exchange of information, ideas, options, and alternatives. Advice, guidance and consultation are appreciated and expected from you where appropriate to expertise. (SHARED)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green</strong></td>
<td>One’s relationship to the contextual world of knowledge and values is a matter of personal responsibility and choice.</td>
<td>Instructor is a source of support and affirmation of choices. You can help students explore the implications and responsibilities of their informed choices and encourage student commitment. Issues of subjective and individual style as an expression of self become important. (INTERNAL)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Structured Reflection at Kalamazoo College
An excerpt from the 2012 Kalamazoo College Self-Study Report

Though not yet widespread, use of structured reflection is gaining traction in many areas of the College, especially through a FIPSE-funded project being carried out to explore potentially innovative advising practices. Structured reflection initially developed a strong theoretical and empirical base at the College through research done in a series of projects funded by grants from The Teagle Foundation in 2004 and 2008. Kiran Cunningham (Anthropology/Sociology) and Bob Grossman (Psychology) led the way with their projects investigating factors that catalyze transformative learning in our students. Through their work, and through collaborations with faculty colleagues, they clarified a very effective approach to structured reflection. Our definition of structured reflection, developed and refined by faculty and staff at Kalamazoo College and illustrated in what has come to be known on campus as the Structured Reflection Triangle,\(^1\) is the following: Structured Reflection is a process that can catalyze transformative learning (i.e., learning that ultimately fosters a change in habit of mind, or change in frame of reference) by employing intentionally designed exercises, activities, or assignments that help students (and others) interrogate, make connections between, and examine consonance or dissonance between assumptions held, theories and concepts, and experiences encountered. When engaged in structured reflection, an individual, or a group of interacting individuals, steps aside from being a subject in a life and begins viewing ideas held and experiences encountered as objects in ways that can promote transformation of the individual from being externally defined to developing self-authorship.\(^2\) Through self-authorship students construct their own educational paths at Kalamazoo College and throughout their lives.

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