

Transformative learning as an ideological critique

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According to Jack Mezirow, power is a tool that is acquired by an individual after a successful accomplishment of significant life tasks. He connects the notion of power to his transformative learning theory where he defines transformative learning as a type of learning that shapes the learner and produces a significant impact. Among the sources of power in accordance with the theory is dialogue, building on understanding, experience and reception of cognitive learning. In accordance with transformational learning theory, the focus of power is on an individual other than the society, thus implying an individual can achieve his or her personal transformation that is distinct from the society. In a classroom set up, the learner who can attain a substantial degree of critical reflection, rational discourse and experience are considered competent in the subject area (Mezirow, 2006).

According to Paulo Friere, an appropriate learning process is not one that treats learners as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and ideas, a notion he terms as “banking model.” In his understanding, the learner should be treated as a co-founder of knowledge and information, thus bestowing power of information creation to the oppressed in the society. Friere associates power to freedom, which must be taken and not a gift (Freire, 2008). According to Paulo Friere, cognitive growth is an important aspect of enhancing understanding of the power structure, thus cognitive growth aid in the emancipation of the oppressed.

Critics of Jack Mezirow differ from his claims of power in relation to transformational learning by arguing that Mezirow’s theory does not in cooperate the collective action of the learners as a source of power but rather focuses on individuals as the sole initiators of the learning power.

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Mezirow is thus criticized for putting more focus on critical reflection at the expense of affective learning. Additionally, Mezirow focuses on individuals, which according to scholars is not true for transformational learning, as this type of learning draws a lot from the role relationship. Transformational learning theory is thus seen to be overemphasizing on rationality and lacks engagement with true power relationship.

In relation to the power model by Paulo Friere, his critics have faulted his viewpoint of freedom as emancipation of the oppressed from the oppressor. Arguments have been developed for his lack of consideration to gender as a category of the oppressed that his work model does not address.

Additionally, Friere has been criticized for failure to address the forms of power held by the teacher based on his or her gender, race or workplace history. (Brookfield, 2006). The work of Friere has been criticized due to inferences on his Christian belief and working with the oppressed; thus his work may not be applicable in other cultural settings.

Understanding of the theme of power as a class should in cooperate analysis of relevant theories on the subject and their critics to find an intrinsic understanding of the power model. In the class, working together would aid in building understanding of the theme through group discussions where divergent and convergent views are accommodated to understand the differences and similarities that exist between individuals in relation to the topic.

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