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# Shedding Light on the Underlying Forms of Transformative Learning Theory

## Introducing Three Distinct Categories of Consciousness

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*This article supports the continued development of second-wave theories of transformative learning by building on the work of Mezirow and Kegan. It examines the limitations of Mezirow's ideal of critical discourse and presents a case for Scharmer's account of generative dialogue as a process map and practice for supporting and catalyzing transformative learning in groups. Finally, this article examines how generative dialogue supports transformative shifts in at least three distinct categorical forms of learner's consciousness: lines, stages, and states.*

*Keywords: generative dialogue; multiple intelligences; ways of knowing; discourse; transformative learning*

The form that is undergoing transformation needs to be better understood; if there is no form there is no transformation.

Kegan, 2000, p. 48

Since its inception 3 decades ago, transformative learning (TL) theory has continued to grow from Jack Mezirow's (1978) initial conception, which provided adult educators with a theoretical framework and a phase-based process for facilitating TL. Mezirow's theory has also developed in response to a growing number of divergent discussions and critical reinterpretations of his work (Taylor, 1998). More recent criticisms raise concerns that Mezirow's theory is acontextual (Cunningham, 1992), overemphasizes rationality (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Cranton, 1994), does not adequately account for other ways of knowing (Kasl & Yorks, 2002), and privileges individual change over social change (Welton, 1995), among other limitations. Although Mezirow (2005) has appealed for more research and conceptual development of other dimensions of TL that fall outside the scope of his work, he has not

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updated his notion that there is “an inherent logic, ideal, and purpose in the process of transformative learning” (1997, p. 11). This suggests that he continues to place rationality at the helm of his theory, which risks marginalizing or devaluing other ways of knowing (Gunnlaugson, 2005) in addition to failing to take into account the limitations of conventional reason.<sup>1</sup>

In response to these shortcomings, there is a need for more comprehensive accounts of TL that attempt to better account for the rich diversity of existing theories. Within the recent decade, there has emerged a second wave of more “integrative” (e.g., Illeris, 2004; Taylor, 2005), “holistic” (e.g., Cranton & Roy, 2003; Dirkx, 1997), and “integral” (e.g., Ferrer, Romero, & Albareda, 2005; Gunnlaugson, 2004, 2005; O’Sullivan, 1999; O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor, 2002) perspectives that expand beyond the scope of Mezirow’s (1978) seminal contribution to offer a more comprehensive account of TL. In the first section of this article, I build on this second wave of contributions by advocating for the continued development of TL theory that explicitly recognizes the strengths and limitations of conventional reason within the broader theoretical context of multiple intelligences and ways of knowing. I make my case by way of a brief analysis of Robert Kegan’s (2000) framework of transformative learning and development with further unpacking of his question “What form is transforming?” In the second section of this article, I explore the limitations of guiding TL processes by *critical reflection* (Mezirow, 1997), which remains the linchpin of Mezirow’s ideal of discourse. Partly in support of Mezirow’s (1997, p. 10) view that “transformative learning is rooted in the way human beings communicate,” I introduce *generative dialogue* (Gunnlaugson, 2006; Isaacs, 1999; Scharmer, 2000, 2003) as a practice of conversation that draws on a broader spectrum of ways of knowing mediated by “meta-awareness”<sup>2</sup> (Jordan, 2000) rather than discursive reason, which in my experiences as a dialogue educator helps support and catalyze the conditions for TL in groups. Leading into the final section, and informed by Wilber’s integral paradigm, I introduce three categories or *forms* of learner’s consciousness—that is, stages, lines, and states—that generative dialogue engages as an integral communication ideal.

## Broadening the Scope of Mezirow and Kegan’s Frameworks of TL

Transformative learning was initially characterized as either a dramatic or a gradual shift in a person’s frame of reference (Mezirow, 1978). Transformative learning theorists have since attempted to broaden the scope of TL theory to include the dimensions of learning that, as noted above, are missing from Mezirow’s work. To adequately account for the respective gifts of multiple ways of knowing (Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Taylor, 1998) and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983; Kallenbach, 1999; Wilber, 2003c), there is a need to consider how Mezirow’s and Kegan’s frameworks can more effectively incorporate these diverse modes of apprehension.

In his more recent research, Mezirow (2003) uses frames of reference as a kind of universal construct to account for a broader array of ways of knowing, multiple intelligences, in addition to a eclectic assortment of mixed categories:

Frames of reference include fixed interpersonal relationships, political orientations, cultural bias, ideologies, schemata, stereotyped attitudes and practices, occupational habits of mind, religious doctrine, moral-ethical norms, psychological preferences and schema, paradigms in science and mathematics, frames in linguistics and social sciences, and aesthetic values and standards. (p. 59)

Mezirow (1997) unpacks frame of reference into two basic parts: habits of mind and a point of view. *Habits of mind* are deeply embedded assumptions that we hold, and a *point of view* is an outward perspective that we take in response to a given life—world situation or set of circumstances. For Mezirow, our point of view emerges from our habits of mind, which are more deeply woven into our character, worldview, and habitual ways of interpretation.

Adult learning scholar-practitioner Robert Kegan (2000) draws attention to the source of Mezirow's conception of frames of reference in pointing out that "at its root, a frame of reference is a way of knowing" (p. 52). Within Kegan's framework of TL, he goes a step further than Mezirow and maps out the epistemologies of adult learners from the third to the fifth of five stages of development, moving from the third-order *socialized* mind to the fourth-order *self-authoring* mind, and finally to the fifth-order *self-transforming* mind. In this way, Kegan addresses the subject of adult TL in terms of the cognitive and self-related *form* of the learner's consciousness or mind. Kegan (2000, p. 52) does not make distinctions concerning different stages of other ways of knowing, but instead remarks that our frames of reference have affective, cognitive, moral, interpersonal, and intrapersonal *colorings*. However, Kegan has yet to address Wilber's (2000) insight that different ways of knowing develop both independently of and interdependently to one another. As such, we are left to speculate to what degree Kegan accounts for other ways of knowing within this overarching framework.

How might we begin to conceptualize frames of reference to better take into account the respective terms of truth or validity of different ways of knowing? For example, kinesthetic or body knowing, which develops along different stages of kinesthetic intelligence, can be assessed on terms internal to its own form of knowing (Ferrer et al., 2005; Gunnlaugson, 2006). Kegan's (2000) notion that learners will need to evolve their "orders" of mind to meet the different challenges of an increasingly complex and hidden curriculum of adult life is a helpful developmental insight. However, to account for multiple ways of knowing as colorings on a more primary epistemology downplays the significance of distinct epistemological frameworks that correspond with each way of knowing.

Expanding on the categories of Howard Gardner's (1983) theory of multiple intelligences, Wilber (2003b) introduces the framework of *lines of development* as a way to better differentiate the different capacities of learners:

The exact number of developmental lines (and the number of levels in any of the lines) are issues that can only be decided by ongoing structural research. To date, there appears to be at least two dozen relatively independent developmental lines . . . cognitive, musical, kinesthetic, linguistic, moral, mathematical, interpersonal, values, needs, defenses, self-identity, role-taking, ideas of the good, spatial temporal perception, creativity, among others—but again, this is a decision for ongoing structural research. (p. 85)

Rather than focusing on an overall capacity, or global intelligence, learners' abilities need to be addressed within the respective developmental line one is considering. Wilber (2000) also regards developmental lines as "streams" because although most of these capacities develop in a relatively independent fashion, many draw from similar, or neighboring, lines of intelligence. Overall, Wilber's category of developmental lines introduces a provisional set of distinctions to the discourse of existing TL theory by offering a more comprehensive theoretical framework within which to evaluate how learners' myriad capacities and potentials unfold over time.<sup>3</sup>

Returning to Mezirow's (1997) project of transforming our taken-for-granted frames of reference primarily through processes of critical reflection, his work remains largely embedded within the horizons of discursive rationality. Consequently, he does not explicitly take into account the limits of rationality, instead advocating for TL processes that reinforce its healthy development. Many adult and higher educators, including myself, would agree that it is desirable to support the development of conventional reason, particularly in contexts in which reason is marginalized. Yet, from an integrally informed perspective (Gunnlaugson, 2005), healthy discursive reason does not take its perspective to be final. Rather, through advanced cognitive stages such as vision-logic<sup>4</sup> (Wilber, 1995), meta-awareness (Jordan, 2000), and the self-transforming mind (Kegan, 2000), learners can begin to experience first-hand knowledge of the significance and limitations of conventional reason.

As noted earlier, Kegan (2000, p. 63) addresses this cognitive form within a set of five increasingly complex epistemologies that learners evolve over the course of their lifetime, with many adults developing only as far as his third stage. In other words, Kegan's model is focused primarily on four major *epochal* transformations, not all of which individual learners may go through. However, this arguably limits his theoretical contribution to the cognitive and self-related epistemological lines of TL. Given the growing significance of multiple ways of knowing and multiple intelligences in adult and higher education discourse, in venturing beyond yet respecting the categories of conventional reason, Ferrer et al. (2005) aptly point out the challenges of flowing between multiple ways of knowing in practice:

In practical terms, this means that most students are at first incapable of elaborating intellectual knowledge from emotional/somatic experience and of remaining in mindful contact with their hearts and bodies while engaged in intellectual discussion. We interpret this difficulty as a sign of the prevalent state of dissociation between these worlds in the modern Western self. . . . In our view, this predicament calls for the exploration of methodological structures that systematically bridge

those different worlds, foster their collaborative epistemic competence, and lead to creative academic fruits and sound shared knowledge. (p. 324)

Once again, as TL scholar-practitioners, we are faced with the challenge of how to proceed with expanding our existing vocabulary of different forms of TL to better account for and guide the varied experiences of adult learners. By differentiating forms of TL in terms of multiple intelligences (and ways of knowing that arise from these distinct intelligences), it is possible to cultivate a more differentiated understanding of the respective potentials and capacities of learners. To serve future research, there is a need to conceptualize development in terms of the differentiation, maturation, and integration of distinct lines or streams (at least some of which are distinct forms of knowing) within the context of TL. In turn, such a conceptual project will begin to prepare the foundation for helping educators and learners gain access to a wider and deeper range of experiences that accompany these forms of knowing. In practice, working from more comprehensive frameworks of TL will help learners identify other valid forms of TL experiences.

## Moving From Critical Reflection to Generative Dialogue

As Mezirow (2003), Schugurensky (2002), and other TL scholars have pointed out, TL hinges on critical reflection on the unexamined assumptions and expectations that we hold. In this way, TL processes require participating in forms of spoken discourse in which learners can reflect on their actions and uncover insights from the meaning, experiences, and opinions expressed by others. For Mezirow, spoken discourse becomes the chief vehicle by which or context in which we transform our frames of reference through critical reflection on our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind. Following Habermas, Mezirow (2003) describes this process as “communicative learning” and maintains that forms of perspective transformation require critical reflection born out of social discourse. Yet he also maintains that these processes are not exclusively group mediated.

As I note above, criticisms have been raised that critical reflection is granted too much prominence by Mezirow and other TL theorists (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Cranton, 1994; Taylor, 1998). Yet counterclaims that TL is primarily an intuitive, creative, emotional process (Kasl & Yorks, 2002) can also be problematic to the degree that Mezirow’s initial claims are inverted, which often results in eclipsing or marginalizing reason. This is not to suggest that intuition, creativity, and emotion do not play vital roles in TL. Rather, it is to ask how we might advance modes of discourse that draw on a broader spectrum of multiple ways of knowing, including critical reflection. Mezirow (1997) points out that our experiences of TL are shaped by our methods of discourse. According to Mezirow, educators who are committed to facilitating TL need to adhere to “ideal conditions of discourse” as a goal and set of standards to evaluate their performance:

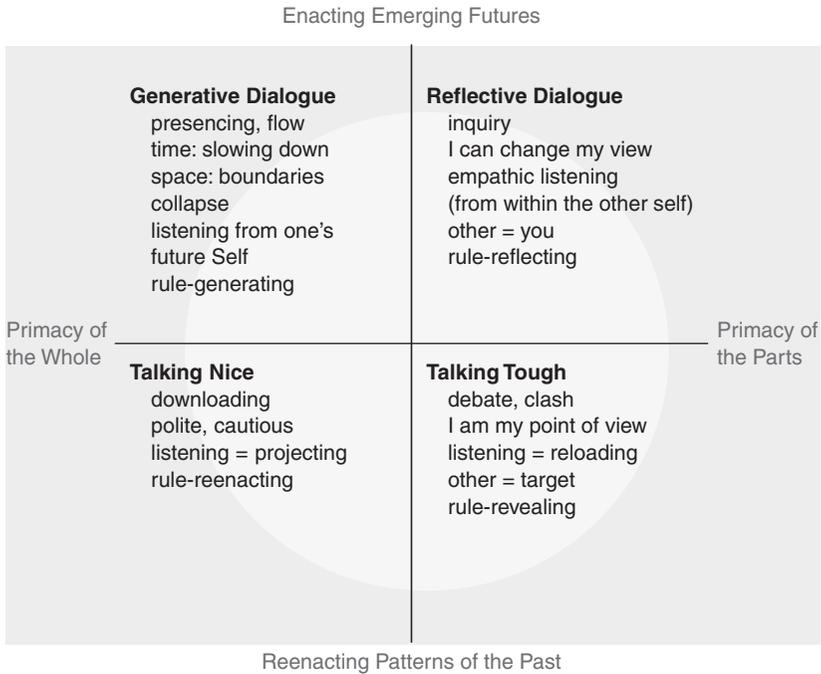
Educators must help learners be aware and critical of their own and others’ assumptions. Learners also need practice in recognizing frames of reference and

using their imaginations to redefine problems from a different perspective. Finally, learners need to be assisted to participate effectively in discourse. Discourse is necessary to validate what and how one understands, or to arrive at a best judgment regarding a belief. In this sense, learning is a social process, and discourse becomes central to making meaning. (p. 10)

In advocating dispositions that support critical reflection, what Mezirow describes as the ideal conditions of discourse are well suited for maintaining social norms of public life within a liberal democratic system. However, within contexts of adult and higher education where TL is an explicit intention and aim, there is a need to develop more comprehensive conceptions of communicative interactions that acknowledge the contributions of conventional discourse practice, support practices that incorporate multiple ways of knowing, and bring forth other TL objectives heretofore absent from Mezirow's (2003) ideal of a "rational learner." I am convinced there is a need to question the "safer" and "less messy" forms of communicative interactions that marginalize other ways of knowing or keep them in a state of perpetual immaturity under parameters set by discursive reason. Echoing TL educator Maureen O'Hara's (2003) view, there is a call to develop more integral forms of educational practice, which cultivate a broader range of patterns of mind and consciousness to meet the increasingly complex demands of emerging 21st-century learning and life contexts.

In response, this article presents a case for generative dialogue as a method and practice of conversation that can support and serve as a catalyst for TL. Informed by Bohm's (1996) conception of dialogue and the MIT dialogue project (Isaacs, 1993), Scharmer's (2003) account of generative dialogue<sup>5</sup> introduces a process model (Figure 1)<sup>6</sup> that outlines the movement of group conversation from conventional discussion (talking nice) to debate (talking tough) through reflective inquiry (reflective dialogue) toward forms of cocreative engagement in the final field of generative dialogue.

Similar to Mezirow's (2003) ideal of discourse, the third field of "reflective dialogue" in Scharmer's (2000) model describes a context in which learners can safely discover and inquire into one another's assumptions. Interestingly, Mezirow does not prescribe a practice or set of practices for discourse. Yet—perhaps somewhat ironically—he notes that it takes practice (Mezirow, 2003). In contrast, David Bohm (1996) describes an attention-based practice of *suspension*. Suspension is important within the reflective dialogue stage of Scharmer's model, insofar as it helps participants reveal their tacit or hidden assumptions together during the dialogue. Absent from Mezirow's model, suspension helps learners cultivate a first-hand experience of the nature of thought, rationality, and consciousness within a collective context. Over time, suspension helps an individual become less identified with his or her habits of mind and points of view. Learning to be less embedded or reified in their perspectives, learners gradually develop a fundamentally different basis of relationship to their reasoning and emotional processes, as well as how they come to know these processes. To put this in the parlance of Kegan's (1982) TL framework, we learn to *have* our thoughts rather than *be* our thoughts,



**Figure 1:** Four Fields of Generative Dialogue  
 SOURCE: Four Fields of Generative Dialogue (2003).

to *have* our feelings rather than *be* our feelings. In this regard, suspension plays a practical and active role in helping learners explore horizons of experience that lie beyond the conventional categories of identity and discourse.

Suspending our thought processes when encountering moments of difference, dissonance, judgment, and so forth invites the possibility of slowing down our stream of consciousness. This can, with practice, provide a receptive opening or “clearing” (Heidegger, 1962) where learners can make experiential contact with emotional, intuitive, imaginative, kinesthetic, and other forms of knowing. In this way, suspension offers a practice for learners to explore the subtle textures and nuances of different ways of knowing. By slowing down the pace of conventional discourse, learners can explore those ways of knowing that otherwise dwell on the periphery of a group or an individual’s horizon of awareness. Given the potential of feelings and emotions to prompt reflective learning and insights, suspension helps develop a willingness within learning communities to respond to the feelings, emotions, intuitive promptings, kinesthetic shifts, and so forth that might otherwise be suppressed and that might, in turn, create barriers for TL and personal development.

Following from suspension is the practice of *presencing* (Scharmer, 2000), a key liberating discipline within the fourth stage or field of generative dialogue.

Presencing is a contemplative practice that helps learners move beyond reflective discourse, which is primarily informed by memory and the past. As a foreground to contemplative practice, critical and reflective discourse helps learners expose their unexamined tacit assumptions. Beneath tacit knowledge is the deeper category of *self-transcending knowledge* (Scharmer, 2001a) that becomes available as learners develop their capacity for presencing. Unlike Kolb's (1984) classic learning cycle in which knowledge is built on previous knowledge, presencing involves learning from attention to what is emerging—knowledge that is sensed but not yet embodied in our experience. This takes place through forms of whole-body sensing and listening from the emerging shared meaning at the generative dialogue stage. Presencing becomes a vital practice to bring to group inquiry insofar as it opens up creative possibilities for unfolding new knowledge from a range of ways of knowing rather than relying purely on discursive reasoning, which tends to eclipse these possibilities. From learning to witness the stream of our ideas and beliefs (i.e., suspension) and pre-sense (i.e., presencing) emerging meaning and knowledge, we begin to explore beyond the traditional categories or forms of TL in groups.

In addition to the above-mentioned practices, and as distinct from Mezirow's ideal of discourse, from my experiences in teaching and facilitating generative dialogue, I have come to appreciate how the process can serve the developmental function of a "holding environment" (Winnicott, 1965). Kegan (1982) has since recontextualized Winnicott's construct as the psychosocial environment at each stage of development throughout one's lifespan. Broadly characterized as the particular form of life-world conditions that an individual is embedded within, one's holding environment is a reference to the quality of the contexts out of which we grow. As our form of discourse shapes the "norms" of interaction within our peer and learning cultures, generative dialogue practice provides a *culturing* environment of conversation. Contrasted with Mezirow's ideal of discourse, generative dialogue is structured by awareness rather than habituated past patterns of critical reflection, memory, or thought. In this regard, generative dialogue practice opens a collective learning space where moment-to-moment attention can permeate the conversation. Over time, this begins to create a holding environment for conversation that can help better support learners' array of needs—particularly the destabilizing effects of disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1978) that invariably surface. What makes generative dialogue particularly effective as a holding environment are the practices of suspension and presencing, which resemble the ideal learning conditions for transformative pedagogy insofar as they promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust (Taylor, 2000), as well as the capacity to simply be and co-construct meaning from the shared presence and presencing of the group.

Isaacs (1993) interprets this holding space with the metaphor of a series of "containers" of conversation where participants learn how to develop a collective capacity to hold the creative tension between different ideas, conflicting emotions, and different ways of knowing. This creates an alchemical vessel where social learning processes can be contained, allowing tensions and paradoxes charged with energy to creatively unfold. In this way, generative dialogue offers a series of holding environments that accompany each stage of conversation. In

turn, this provides an overall set of integrative circumstances (Clark, 1991) to support learners' TL experiences. It is important to note that the educator alone cannot facilitate these conditions. Rather, they are coconstructed and codeveloped by participants who are willing to assume shared responsibility for collectively creating conditions that foster TL.

## Exploring Forms of TL as Illuminated by Generative Dialogue

Because both the subject and phenomenon of transformation are enormously exciting and appealing, there's a temptation to become intoxicated by the thrill, hope and spectacle of it all, which can make it difficult to get at what transformation is. (Kegan, 2002, p. 144)

As Kegan (2002) points out, the analytic dimension of TL needs to be better distinguished from its emotional or aesthetic dimension to bring more clarity to what is actually transforming. There has been a lack of consensus or clarity within the TL field around the question of what exactly constitutes transformation in the context of adult learning and development. Partly this is because of the subject being mysterious (Dirkx, 1997), the language appealing (Brookfield, 2000), and an overall lack of common ground and shared theory (Mezirow & Aalsburg, 2000) within the field. For these reasons, we are left with the challenge of discerning and identifying further significant forms of TL.

In response to this challenge, the final section of this article will expand on Kegan's (2000) notion that definable distinctions (i.e., forms of consciousness) are needed to better understand the transformative shifts that take place for learners. It will do so by describing how generative dialogue practice promotes learners' development through different stages within various lines of development with corresponding changes in the learners' states of consciousness as articulated by Wilber's integral framework.

## Change in Learners' Stages Within Developmental Lines

In short, Kegan's framework of TL draws our attention to how people's evolving order of consciousness structures their experience differently at each stage of development. Taking a step back from Kegan's model, let us now consider the self (or self-system or self-sense) that develops in adult and young adult learners. Although there are many ways to depict the self, Wilber's (2003e) research has advanced an integral template of the various phenomena of human consciousness that constitute the self, culled from more than 100 developmental psychological systems from both East and West. Informed by these developmental frameworks, Wilber maintains that the self unfolds through various stages or levels in a flowing series of streams.

According to Wilber, one of the primary characteristics of our self-sense is how we identify<sup>7</sup> with these basic structures or levels of consciousness. When this takes place, we generate a specific type of self-identity, with specific needs and drives at different stages. As noted above, Kegan (2000) has articulated these levels in terms of five stages of epistemological styles. Wilber's (2000) integral spectrum of consciousness relies on a similar categorization ranging from 7 to 10 functional groupings or basic levels. The spiral dynamics framework of Beck and Cohen (1996) uses eight stages depicting the evolution of values and worldviews. Kohlberg's (1968) scale of moral development is based on six stages. Loewinger's (1976) ego development model uses a dozen stages. And so the list of developmental models<sup>8</sup> unfolds, each working with a different scale of measurement and specific feature of consciousness.

By bringing this broad cross-section of developmental models together, Wilber (2003c) points out that a specific developmental line can more optimally represent each developmental model. In addition to the multiple intelligences discussed earlier, developmental lines also represent the self-related (Wilber, 2000) lines of development as in the examples listed above. As Wilber (2000) points out,

There are the developmental lines in general (cognitive, affective, aesthetic, kinesthetic, mathematical, etc), and, as a subset of those, there are the developmental lines that are especially and intimately associated with the self, its needs, its identity, and its development—and those are the self-related lines. (p. 38)

According to Wilber (2003e), the lines with more centrality or prominence in our experience are the self-related lines.<sup>9</sup> Returning to Kegan (2000), within an integral context of neighboring developmental lines, his model is one of at least two dozen other developmental frameworks. In instances in which Kegan's framework might be mistakenly applied as a comprehensive framework of development, the theory becomes prone to conflating the part (i.e., the domain of consciousness his research addresses) with the whole (i.e., the spectrum of existing Eastern and Western perspectives of human consciousness). From this brief analysis, we can see that treating Kegan's or any developmental theorist's model as an authoritative paradigm of overall development ignores the contributions of neighboring developmental lines.<sup>10</sup> Kegan's model works well within its own domain and context of application. Yet, if we overextend this interpretive lens into other domains of consciousness or experience, we risk denying, excluding, or marginalizing the insights from neighboring paradigms (i.e., Kegan's earlier reference to other ways of knowing as colorings). Wilber (2003a) elaborates,

Any plausible integral metatheory, by virtue of its attempt to acknowledge all major legitimated paradigms in various fields, would set implicit boundaries to the believability of any single paradigm operating on its own. An integral metatheory would, in effect, free the paradigm by limiting it. As it is now, when any paradigm oversteps its authority and begins to make pronouncements about other phenomena brought forth by other paradigms, the only principle guiding the pronouncements tends to be "I'm right, you're wrong." (p. 1)

In this regard, Wilber's integral approach provides a helpful framework for recontextualizing existing partial perspectives of TL theory.<sup>11</sup>

The holding environments within each field of generative dialogue can help serve as a practical context for exploring changes in learners' self-related lines, which in turn support the development of more complex stages of consciousness along different developmental lines. With Bohm's (1996) practice of suspension, learners move into a receptive and open state of attentiveness that creates the conditions for nondefensive inquiry. The subtle action of suspension, like awareness-based forms of meditation, frees up energy to consider another's way of thinking or perspective in a respectful and inclusive manner that supports the emergence of Buber's (1958) I–Thou relationships rooted in mutuality. Suspension also simulates the movement of psychological development that Kegan (1982) describes as central to his subject/object principle. In other words, what you are identified with or embedded in at one stage of development tends to be transcended at the next stage, allowing you to see yourself and others with less subjective coloring. The elements of ourselves that we are tied, fused, or embedded in are the elements we are subject to. The elements of our knowing or experience that we can reflect on are the elements that we can hold as objects in our awareness. Suspension, therefore, provides an experience of the process of forming and reforming our relationship to the way we hold our ideas, beliefs, feelings, and experiences as learners.

With practice, in generative dialogue participants become more attentive to the life conditions, beliefs, and worldviews in which they are embedded. It would be misleading to suggest the practice of suspension brings about a fundamental change in stage within one's self-related line of development. However, suspension facilitates and simulates the transition from being focally identified with one's thoughts or feelings to being free to witness them, which gives us a preview of a different self-sense or more complex order of consciousness, as in Kegan's (2000) framework. To what extent suspension plays a role over time and with practice in facilitating a stage shift within the self-related lines of development or other multiple intelligences remains a question for future research. Still, generative dialogue provides an important function in this process by stimulating both the self-related lines of development and the capacity- and skill-based lines by giving learners an experience of moving from being one's ideas to witnessing them; from being one's thoughts to witnessing them; from being one's feelings to witnessing them.<sup>12</sup> With practice, adult learners begin to cultivate a learning disposition that is open to change and evolving more complex adaptive forms of being and learning in our worlds of conversation.

### Change in Learners' Capacity for Shifting States of Consciousness

Mezirow frames TL as the process in which adult learners call into question the uncritically assimilated frames of reference, beliefs, or purposes that have prevented them from developing autonomous thinking. According to Mezirow's

(1997) ideal of discourse, we become critically reflective of our assumptions through the cycles of action and critical reflection. However, as this section will attempt to convey, such a stance often privileges analysis and critical reflection in ways that prevent the emergent capacity of meta-awareness (Jordan, 2000), which is helpful in supporting the emergence of multiple ways of knowing and deepened states of consciousness (Wilber, 2003c).

In addition to critical reflection, generative dialogue practice cultivates meta-awareness as a gateway to inviting and honoring other ways of knowing that would otherwise be suppressed or left unexplored at the margins of group discourse. Integral theorist Thomas Jordan (2000) defines meta-awareness as follows:

Meta-awareness means awareness of the sensorimotor schematas, emotions, desires and thoughts that tumble through our being. Instead of being had by one's habitual behavioral patterns, emotions, desires and thoughts, meta-awareness means that there is a locus of witnessing in consciousness that can make the behaviors, emotions, desires and thoughts objects of attention. (p. 33)

In the context of generative dialogue, the traditional cycles of action and critical reflection are supplemented with an additional cycle of meta-awareness. Before the emergence of the meta-aware position, the learners' attention tends to be quite absorbed by the emerging content of the discourse itself. With the cultivation of meta-awareness, less of our attention becomes bound up in the discursive realm of thought and the emotional forms of reactivity that tend to be embedded in our thought patterns (Bohm, 1996) as conveyed in the last section on suspension.

From generative dialogue experiences, I have found that meta-awareness can take numerous forms within the individual and the intersubjective field of inquiry. In the latter context, meta-awareness often simply involves venturing a meta-conversation about the existing conversation. Within the later stages of generative dialogue, there is a need for recursive conversations about what was just talked about, felt, intuited, or sensed. These recursive conversations may initially bring about frustration for participants who may claim to experience the dialogue as not going anywhere. This frustration often dissipates if the group can let go of the need for task-oriented objectives in the interests of serving learning-oriented processes. Alongside other practices of generative dialogue (e.g., suspension, presencing, and creating a holding environment within a conversation), meta-awareness helps us notice deeper assumptions or behaviors in ourselves and the group that were previously unconscious—especially creative possibilities of new knowledge that has not yet fully emerged. In this way, the group learns to explore the subtle, emergent territory of learning, which tends not to be immediately recognizable to others who adhere to conventional standards of group discourse (e.g., task-based learning or critical reflection). By focusing on being aware of and differentiating from the contents of awareness, meta-awareness becomes a fertile space for supporting the development of other ways of knowing through generative dialogue.

Mezirow (2003) characterizes TL as a form of “metacognitive reasoning” in emphasizing insight into the “source, structure, and history of a frame of reference,

as well as judging its relevance, appropriateness and consequences" (p. 61). Analogous to the processes of metacognitive reasoning, meta-awareness involves a movement from being embedded in one's cognitive processes to taking a metaperspective on them. Yet meta-awareness is distinct from metacognition in that metacognitive processes involve awareness within the context of cognition, whereas meta-awareness includes, yet extends beyond, the categories of cognitive reasoning. From these expanded horizons of embodied awareness, participants learn to be *meta-aware* of different intelligences, faculties of knowing, and ways of being in the world and classroom. Reflective thinking, which relies on metacognitive reasoning, tends to rely on executive control and self-communication about experiences (Mezirow, 1981). From Mezirow's perspective, the learner uses metacognitive awareness for the purposes of gaining cognitive control over a given learning experience. From the perspective I am introducing, learners are no longer investing their identity in trying to gain control of their learning. Rather, there is a more primary commitment to allowing for a multiplicity of possibilities and apparent contradictions to coexist to begin to glean patterns of knowing through forms of vision-logic and embodied meta-awareness. Considering Mezirow's ideal of independent thinking from this postconventional perspective, autonomous thinking is no longer the most mature or appropriate ideal for engaging the TL process within contexts of adult and higher education (Gunnlaugson, 2005). If one places Kegan's (2000) self-authoring mind (e.g., fourth order) as the highest stage, this would be a fair presupposition. However, if we address Kegan's fifth stage of the "self-transforming mind," the cognition of adult learners begins to develop to the level of vision-logic. At this stage, learners are no longer exclusively identified with their interpretive ideologies and, therefore, can witness others' perspectives as partial facets of a larger dynamic unfolding wholeness.

As the capacities for meta-awareness and vision-logic strengthen, so too does the *witness-self*, which according to Wilber (2000) is available to everyone regardless of their stage of consciousness within the self-related lines. In other words, it is not necessary to be at either Kegan's (2000) fourth- or fifth-order consciousness to experience the witness-self. As participants learn how to hold the content of their consciousness in a fundamentally different way, via suspension, they learn to become familiar with the witness position in conversation. The witness is constructed and identified from a new foundation of distributed compassionate awareness (Scharmer, 2001b) versus the self-cherishing ground of egoic processes. As expressed in various wisdom traditions (e.g., Buddhism, Hinduism), this unidentified form of witnessing awareness is paradoxically not of space or time, yet always present (Aurobindo, 2000; Combs, 2002; Wilber, 2000). According to Wilber, traditionally individuals can experience the witness-self through forms of contemplative practice that bring about shifts in their state of consciousness.

From Wilber's (2003c) integral framework, the transformative potentials contained in the deeper states of consciousness represent what consciousness will later become at higher stages. In making the distinction between states of consciousness (which are temporary) and structures of consciousness (which are permanent), within the context of discourse, this distinction can be helpful for identifying subtle

states of being that temporarily arise within individuals and groups. In turn, learning to recognize states of consciousness can help learners sensitize to these optimal learning experiences as a vital dimension of TL. As Wilber (2003d, 2003e) points out, a person can, through long-term contemplative practice, begin to convert these temporary states into permanent traits or structures, which means that learners begin to have access to these realms on a more-or-less continuous and conscious basis.

If bringing about such transformations is to be a realistic aim within adult and higher educational contexts, there is a value in establishing practices to cultivate such potentials in our lives. Given that generative dialogue serves as both an evolving container and a discipline within which states of consciousness can be supported and developed, with this distinction we can also address the expanded states of consciousness that accompany shifts in one's worldview or frame of reference. In addition, future research will do well to explore the extent to which Mezirow's (1978, 1981, 1997, 2003, 2005) disorienting dilemma is necessary to produce a state shift. In other words, can the positive expanded states of consciousness experienced within generative dialogue (and other contexts) offer a different learning corridor to shifting one's frame of reference or worldview? Alongside contemplative practices such as awareness-based meditation, generative dialogue offers an andragogical framework for further exploration into the merits of different states of consciousness within an integral framework of TL.

## Closing Remarks

This article builds on Mezirow (1978, 1981, 1997, 2003, 2005) and Kegan's (1982, 2000, 2002) contributions and attempts to shed light on the deeper structures of TL by drawing on Wilber's (1995, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2003e) integral framework to identify three distinct forms of consciousness that are significant within the context of TL. Intended to join the discourse of the emerging second wave of TL theory, this article has also attempted to demonstrate the need to explore how aspects of generative dialogue process (i.e., meta-awareness, vision-logic, multiple intelligences, multiple ways of knowing, suspension, and presencing) help bring about shifts in the forms of the learners' consciousness in terms of the stages of both the capacity-related and self-related lines of development, as well as states of consciousness. Within this preliminary integral framework, there is greater room to honor a range of transformative shifts of consciousness that unfold for learners, in addition to recognizing areas of growth that may have been experienced but not yet identified as a form of TL. Although it is not yet clear to what extent each shift constitutes a fundamental change in form of the learners' consciousness, or the degree to which generative dialogue is needed to enact these transformative processes, my intent is that these and other distinctions raised in this article will offer a preliminary conceptual framework to inform both andragogical practice and future conceptual, hermeneutic, and empirical research.

## Notes

1. It is important to note that Mezirow's (1997) theory of rationality does not take developmental accounts of cognition into account and, therefore, does not distinguish between mid- or higher orders of reason. In a recent article (Gunnlaugson, 2005), I raise the distinction of postconventional forms of cognition (i.e., vision-logic) in contrast to conventional forms of cognition, which tend to be associated with discursive reason and binary categories.

2. Thomas Jordan (2000, p. 33) offers a definition of meta-awareness: "Meta-awareness means awareness of the sensorimotor schematas, emotions, desires and thoughts that tumble through our being. Instead of being had by one's habitual behavioral patterns, emotions, desires and thoughts, meta-awareness means that there is a locus of witnessing in consciousness that can make the behaviors, emotions, desires and thoughts objects of attention."

3. Rather than devise external criteria to assess the validity of these individual lines, Wilber (2000) relies primarily on the preestablished criteria set by each independent researcher.

4. Wilber (1995, p. 185) elaborates on vision-logic: "As rationality continues its quest for a truly universal or global or planetary outlook, non-coercive in nature, it eventually gives way to a type of cognition I call vision-logic. Vision-logic can hold in mind contradictions, it can unify opposites, it is dialectical and non-linear, and it weaves together what otherwise appear to be incompatible notions."

5. Scharmer's (2000, 2003) account of generative dialogue has been more recently applied in the Generative Dialogue Project, a global community of practice that focuses on projects that bring generative dialogue processes into mainstream use for personal and social transformation, particularly within contexts of global governance institutions, including business, government, and civil society.

6. Rather than eliminate distinctions in Scharmer's model that are not explored within the context of this article, I have decided to reproduce Figure 1 in its original form. For further reference on generative dialogue terminology not discussed here, see Scharmer (2000, 2003). For expanded accounts of Scharmer's initial model, see Isaacs (1999) and Gunnlaugson (2006).

7. The self-sense is our sense of self at a given stage of development. It is not so much the content of what we identify with (i.e., relationships, possessions, ideas, etc.), but more the psychological process of identifying how I construct, interpret, and make meaning with what I identify with.

8. According to Wilber (2000), these models have been empirically tested by dozens of developmental theorists with both men and women and across cultures.

9. Other self-related lines include self-identity, morals, needs, and values (Wilber, 2003c).

10. It is important to note that these other frameworks (i.e., developmental lines) have by and large not made their way into the literature of TL theory.

11. Wilber's frameworks provide a useful synthesis of the field of consciousness studies by illustrating the commonalities and underlying patterns of how the different facets of consciousness develop, in addition to providing a meta-theory that attempts to assemble these disparate frameworks within a larger comprehensive paradigm (Gunnlaugson, 2005).

12. Kegan (1982) refers to his subject-object movement as the shift from "being" embedded in certain experiences to "having" them. I have deliberately replaced the term *having* with *witnessing* to better distinguish the relationship between cognition and the

other developmental lines. To *have* the contents of other lines could, in some circles, suggest a kind of cognitive imperialism that fails to honor the respective intelligences and contents of consciousness.

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