

Education as Transformation: Formalism, Moralism and the Substantivist Alternative

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The term 'transformation' and its cognates can be found appended to almost every key term in the contemporary educational lexicon. In educational psychology, teachers are urged to adopt the methods of 'transformational teaching'. In adult education, the theory of 'transformative learning' defines the current research paradigm. Social justice educators regularly couch their consciousness-raising efforts in terms of 'transformative pedagogy'. And in philosophy of education, pragmatists, phenomenologists, neo-Aristotelians and postmodernists alike point to the special transformative quality of education, both in the Anglo-American as well as the German-language discourses. In this essay, we argue that these various conceptions of transformative education can be organised under two theoretical categories, each with its own distinctive understanding of and approach to creating transformative educational experiences: formalism and moralism. In the first two sections, we discuss the characteristic qualities of these two approaches and point to several problems that arise within them. Drawing on recent developments in the philosophy of language and moral psychology, we then advance a 'substantivist' alternative to the formalistic and moralistic approaches, which characterises the transformative experience as a process of renarrativation with two experiential moments: articulation and aspiration. Substantivism is an attractive approach to transformative education, we argue in the final section, because it avoids the problems that arise in the formalistic and moralistic conceptions while providing resources for capturing what is essential to transformative experience in the educational process.

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INTRODUCTION

When we try to express that education should aim for something more significant and more profound than the various instrumental goods it is supposed to deliver, such as degrees, marketable skills, useful knowledge and social capital, we often do so by invoking the language of transformation. Education has the power to transform, we believe, and our pedagogical efforts in the classroom should attempt to harness this inner potential. Today, the term ‘transformation’ and its cognates can be found appended to almost every key term in the educational lexicon. In educational psychology, teachers are urged to adopt the methods of ‘transformational teaching’ (Slavich and Zimbardo, 2012; *cf.* Rosebrough and Leverett, 2011) or to create a space for ‘transformative experiences’ in their classrooms (Pugh, 2011, 2002). In adult education, the theory of ‘transformative learning’ has come to define the current research paradigm (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2008; Taylor and Cranton, 2012). Social justice educators regularly couch their consciousness-raising efforts in terms of ‘transformative pedagogy’ (Albers and Frederik, 2013; Elenes, 2013; Nagda, Gurin and Lopez, 2003; hooks, 1994; Lusted, 1986; *cf.* Shields, 2004, 2010; Weiner, 2003). In philosophy of education, pragmatists, phenomenologists, neo-Aristotelians and postmodernists alike have pointed to the special transformative quality of education, both in the Anglo-American and German-language discourses (Bakhurst, 2015; English, 2014; Higgins, 2011; Jackson, 1986; Koller, 2012; Marotzki, 1990; Meyer-Drawe, 1982; Nohl, 2016). And parallel to this growing consensus in the educational research community, the language of transformation is increasingly used in higher education circles. Describing the mission of Harvard College, Dean Rakesh Khurana (n.d.) claims, ‘We want to ensure we are providing students a deeply transformative experience—intellectually, socially and personally—that will prepare them for a life of service and leadership’ (*cf.* Keeling, 2004).

What exactly does it mean for education, pedagogy, teaching, or learning to be *transformative*, rather than, say, formative, progressive, critical, or any other qualifier we might place before these terms? When one surveys the various responses that educationists have given to this question, the seeming consensus quickly begins to dissipate. For adult educator, Jack Mezirow (1981), ‘perspective transformation’ is an ‘emancipatory process’ in which ‘adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them’ (pp. 6–7). Yet, for philosopher of education Andrea English (2014), the ‘reflective-transformative beginnings of learning’ refer to any instance in which we are confronted with an interruption of our interactions with the surrounding world (p. 76). Educational psychologist, Kevin Pugh (2002), shares English’s phenomenological focus, but believes that teaching for ‘transformative experiences’ means encouraging three concrete actions on the part of the student: ‘1) active use of [a new] concept, 2) an expansion of perception, and 3) an expansion of value’ (p. 1104). Psychologists George Slavich and Philip Zimbardo (2012) agree at least that ‘transformational teaching’ involves three tasks (p. 577), yet for them these focus mainly on developing positive ‘learning-related attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills’

(p. 576). For Paulo Freire (1993) and his followers, such approaches to transformative education cannot not fully suffice, since no truly educational environment can leave out cultivating a commitment to rectifying social injustices. For Freire, this means bringing students to ‘enter into *communion* with the people’ who live in conditions of oppression, an experience he describes as nothing less than a ‘conversion’ and a ‘rebirth’ (Freire, 1993, pp. 42–43).¹ And while David Bakhurst (2015) might agree with Freire that true education thoroughly ‘transforms the mode of life of the human animal’, this is meant to be a description of normal cognitive development rather than a normative call for something like social justice (*cf.* Rödl, 2016; Stojanov, 2014).

In this article, we show that these seemingly divergent understandings of transformative education can be organised under two theoretical categories, each with competing ideas about the meaning and pedagogical implications of transformative education: formalism and moralism. On the former view, transformation is a technical concept, referring to cognitive processes by which our frameworks of understanding undergo a momentous shift. To develop this account, we look closely at the recent work of Andrea English and Hans-Christoph Koller, whose theories of transformation each provide important resources for understanding the formalistic view of transformation. The moralistic view of transformative education, in contrast, outlines a clear ethical telos for the transformative process, often the eradication of oppression and the achievement of social justice. Here we look to the work of Jack Mezirow and social justice education in order to capture the essence of moralistic transformation.²

While compelling in many ways, we argue that neither the formalistic nor the moralistic approach to transformative education fully captures the theoretical and practical potential of transformative education. In the case of formalism, we show that the formalistic approach problematically (1) dichotomises ‘transformative’ and ‘additive’ forms of learning, (2) oversimplifies the phenomenology of transformative experience, and, as a result, (3) fails to provide sufficient pedagogical resources for avoiding the potential trauma caused by transformative experience. In contrast, the moralistic conception of educational transformation possesses important additional resources for addressing this latter problem in particular. Yet, as we argue, its solution, which focuses on the development of interpersonal community, proves to be insufficient as well.

As a corrective to the problems arising in the formalistic and moralistic approaches, we advance what we call a ‘substantivist’ conception of transformative education. Drawing on recent work in the philosophy of language and moral psychology, we argue that educative transformation is best thought of as a *renarrativation*, a rewriting of our life story. In this section, we show that this conception of transformation encourages an approach to transformative education with two experiential moments: (1) the *articulation* of one’s life story through new categories of experience, and (2) the emergence of an *aspiration* toward realising the substantive goods that these categories harbour. In offering this alternative approach to transformative education, the substantivist conception attempts to build on the insights of

the formalistic and moralistic paradigms while avoiding the difficult problems that arise when transformative education is conducted only in their terms.

TRANSFORMATION AS NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE: THE FORMALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

According to the formalistic conception of transformative education, human experience is framed by certain cognitive and conceptual structures that serve to integrate new information received from our environment into an understandable and actionable form. In most cases, this new information ‘fits’ the extant forms pretty well. We may need to make slight changes to our cognitive frames in light of some novel event or occurrence, but these changes typically expand their confines in a straightforward manner, confirming their validity while extending their effectiveness. This gradual expansion of our experiential purview is often referred to as a ‘continuous’ (Bollnow, 1959; Jarvis, 1996; Kagan, 1980) or ‘additive’ (Buck, 1969; English, 2014; Meyer-Drawe, 1982) form of learning. Against this backdrop, ‘transformation’ and its cognates function as technical concepts for describing deeper or more significant forms of learning that go beyond the everyday process of continuously integrating new information into the modes and structures of cognition that we already possess. Transformation implies a break with the everyday, a thoroughgoing reconstruction of our standard ways of engaging with the world. To highlight this point, a distinction is often drawn between continuous learning processes and truly *educative* experiences, variously referred to as processes of ‘transformative learning’ (e.g. English, 2014) or ‘*Bildungsprozesse*’ (e.g. Kokemohr, 2007; Koller, 2012). Thus, the term ‘transformative education’ is, in a strict formalistic sense, redundant. Characterising education as ‘transformative’ is just a way of emphasising the rightful place of such shift-experiences in the educational process.³ The upshot for educational practice is that transformative approaches to teaching and learning can theoretically be applied across the curriculum, and transformative experiences can be had in almost any curricular context that strives for these deeper forms of learning.

One place that we can find formalistic principles at work is in Andrea English’s (2014) *Discontinuity in Learning: Dewey, Herbart and Education as Transformation*. In the book, English sets out to formulate a philosophically grounded conception of learning that reclaims the place of difficulty, struggle and ‘negative experience’ in education. English’s conception closely follows Dewey’s (2008 [1916]) theory of reflective experience as expounded in *Democracy and Education*. For English as for Dewey, true learning proceeds from an interruption in the course of experience. On such occasions, one encounters a ‘discontinuity’, a lack of coordination between one’s expectations and the environment in which one is embedded. In these moments, the world ‘resists our attempts at interaction;’ we ‘*receive something from the world*’ that we had not previously accounted for (p. 66). This unexpected emergence not only offers us a passing surprise, but forces us into reflection on a limitation in our knowledge and ability (p. 70). English even characterises such reflective experiences as an *alienation* from

one's self and environment (p. 99).⁴ Although these experiential discontinuities may at first glance seem to present an impediment to learning, they can simultaneously constitute a crucial first step in a process of 'negative experience', by which our horizons of expectations are negated, reconstituted and transformed. For this to succeed, English argues that we must choose to transform the emergent discontinuity into a solvable problem (p. 75), and commit ourselves to revising the constellation of habits, expectations and modes of thought which led to the problem in the first place.

According to English, this theoretical account urges us to resist creating educational environments that *begin* with pre-made problems because such approaches skip over the crucial pre-reflective beginnings of transformative learning and over-define the ends of the learning process. The conception of learning that underlies such standard understandings of the educational encounter is, for English, one focused on the accumulation of knowledge, for which she uses the German term *Dazulernen* or 'additive' learning. English associates her alternative conception of learning with the concept of *Umlernen* or 'transformative learning' (p. 115).⁵ Unlike additive learning, transformative learning affirms the place of 'struggle, disillusionment, or suffering' in the learning process 'because it involves encounters with something new, such as a new concept, a different perspective, or an unfamiliar activity that we are trying to get to know and understand' (p. 118). As a result, the transformative teacher's task is to productively interrupt the course of her students' experience while cultivating a classroom culture in which the frustrations that naturally result are embraced rather than avoided. English refers to this approach as teaching 'in between', for it emphasises the discontinuous gap between pre-reflective action and transformative-reflective learning (p. 85).

Hans-Christoph Koller (2012), in his popular *Bildung anders denken. Einführung in die Theorie transformatorischer Bildungsprozesse* [Thinking About Education Differently: An Introduction to the Theory of Transformative Educational Processes],⁶ formulates a similar conception of transformative education. Following Humboldt's lead, Koller begins with a conception of the individual as a constellation of linguistically constituted 'self- and world-relations', which take the form of socio-linguistic 'figures' (p. 16). According to Koller, our experience is 'figured' by the several discourses or language games that interact to constitute our social environment. These linguistic figures together make up our 'habitus', which imposes a formidable structuring grip over our practical possibilities for thought and action. While the delimiting quality of the habitus helps us make sense of the social world, it simultaneously closes off certain personal and social imaginaries. Nevertheless, Koller does think that transformative experiences—that is, experiences that reconstruct the habitual figures of our social life—are possible. Unlike English, Koller refers to such experiences as 'transformative educational processes' [*transformatorische Bildungsprozesse*], contrasting these with 'learning processes' [*Lernprozesse*], which he considers characteristically additive or continuous (Kokemohr, 2007; Marotzski, 1990). Yet, like English, Koller looks to Günther Buck's (1981) hermeneutical conception of 'disappointment' (*Enttäuschung*) and negative experience to

explain the dynamics of transformation. On this view, the course of experience is periodically interrupted by ‘crises’, in which what we expect to experience, our experiential anticipation [*Antizipation*], is disappointed by some problematising phenomenon. The crisis thus reveals an inadequacy in our existing horizon of experience—it indicates a breakdown of meaning within it. While, for Buck, such disappointments simultaneously initiate the formation of a new, more comprehensive horizon capable of making meaning of the problematising element, Koller is wary of the progress narrative of Buck’s stance, as well as what he perceives as its inability to cope with the ‘radical difference’ that the source of disappointment represents (pp. 78, 125). Ultimately, Koller seems to agree with English and the phenomenological tradition’s understanding of the ‘horizontal nature’ of experience and transformation, but wants to resist a conception of transformation that entails a complete erasure of the problematising phenomenon in the transformed horizon. This leads him in the end to embrace the discourse theory of Lyotard, defining transformative educational processes as ‘the emergence of new sentences and types of discourse that are necessary for the recognition and leaving open of the *différend* [i.e. the conflict with the problematizing element]’ (p. 97).

In this sense, a transformation for Koller is a re-figuration, or *transfiguration* of the very framework of our social life, for it constitutes a reconstruction of the discourses that make up our experiential habitus. These transformations do not occur randomly; rather they result from an inability of our current linguistic configuration to fulfill some incipient demand from the internal or external environment (p. 16). Thus, like English, Koller argues that transformative educational processes fundamentally involve confrontations with a novel emergence in our perceptual environment—new problems that manifest themselves in our experience, new discursive figures for coping with the problem, and hence new modes of engaging with the world (p. 18). Since such transformations are always mediated by the linguistic figures we already possess, however, Koller emphasises that transformation is more often a re-appraisal, re-construction and re-appropriation of our self and world relations than the dawn of wholly new ones (p. 135).

What, then, are we to make of this first set of theories of educative transformation? While compelling in several ways, there are three problems with the formalistic approach to transformative education that we would like to highlight.

First, consider the stark distinction between transformative learning and additive learning in English’s account—*Umlernen* vs. *Dazulernen*—and Koller’s distinction between learning processes and transformative educational processes—*Lernprozesse* vs. *transformatorische Bildungsprozesse*. While these distinctions definitely point out real and important differences between more everyday forms of learning and transformative experiences, the contrast seems to oversimplify the important educational relationship between the two. Focusing on the ‘discontinuous’ or ‘negative’ moment of transformation, both overlook that ‘additive’ types of learning are central to the construction of a rich and sensitive horizon of expectations, a precondition of meaningful transformation. One such type of meaningful

additive learning is what we might call *honing*. Honing is the familiar process of practicing a well-defined set of skills within the context of pre-defined problems in order to gradually acquire precision and mastery in the employment of these skills. An example from elementary mathematics would be practicing long-division with ever larger numbers. This can be done in a mind-numbing way that stifles interest, or it can be done in a way that sharpens our perceptions and interaction with the world around us. Learning as honing is thus not a 'lower' form of learning that deserves passing mention. It is one of the ways in which we create a dynamic experiential purview that sensitises us to difference and opens us up to transformation. Our efforts to gain precision through practice generate a background stock of experiences against which the novel can begin to emerge. The eye is thereby simultaneously trained to recognise familiar patterns and to notice those that diverge from the norm. As a part of this habituation, the learner must additionally acquire certain qualities, traits or virtues in order to value the challenge of interruption or crisis as an opportunity for growth in the first place. Thus, the meaningful distinction to make is not only between additive and transformative learning, but between those forms of additive learning that conduce to transformative experience and those that do not.

The *second* problem with the formalistic perspective is its difficulty in distinguishing between experiences that we might call 'truly transformative' and those that simply fall under the formalistic definition of transformation. In other words, what counts as transformative on the formalistic view applies to many different kinds of educational experiences, some of which it seems quite odd to call transformative. As an example of this, English (2014) believes that an ah-ha moment about one's reasons for getting a math problem wrong counts as an example of transformative learning because it involves an interruption of experience, the emergence of a problem, and a concerted effort to revise the premise on which the error occurred (p. 135). A few pages earlier she highlights a transformative scene from Edward Said's autobiography in which he discovers a fundamental flaw in how he has understood the point of his education in the first place (p. 127). Putting it bluntly, there are important differences between these two experiences. While it is true that both experiences may involve encounters with the 'novel' and result in some interruption in our relationship to our self and world, our ordinary use of the term 'transformation' rightly suggests that they should not be run together. In this way, formalistic transformative education is at risk of being appropriated by everyday classroom procedures which are anything but transformative in a profound sense. In the case of Koller, the formula he offers for defining transformation as the emergence of 'new sentences and discourses' simply does not seem to do justice to the richness and depth of transformative experiences. Conversions, successful struggles with addiction, moments of discovery, the experience of being initiated into a new social group or practice and so forth are phenomenologically 'thicker' than this formula lets on.⁷

This leads to the *third*, and perhaps most important problem with the formalistic perspective, as we see it. In failing to pay attention to the phenomenology of transformative experience, an overly formalistic attempt to

practice transformative education could have quite negative psychological effects. This is because formalism seems to underappreciate the support that is required for students to overcome the discontinuity involved in negative experience. Initiating disruptive irritations, disappointments and alienations in the classroom can leave students, well, irritated, disappointed and alienated, without resources to work through the negative experience in a productive way. Put differently, students are presented with a bare discontinuity in the way they think and act.

Koller's conception of transformative *Bildung* is especially open to this particular problem, since he remains silent about its pedagogical consequences and thus any pedagogical measures that would need to be taken to avoid such 'bare discontinuities' just mentioned.⁸ English, in contrast, does discuss this issue, introducing an important distinction between 'destructive' instances of discontinuity and more 'productive' instances (2014, p. 124). According to English, 'if learners are left to deal with moments of limitation on their own, without educators or guides, they may remain feeling overwhelmed or submerged, without the possibility for educative transformation' (p. 99). How then might educators support students' confrontations with their limitations? English outlines several pedagogical guidelines for transformative teachers. For example, she argues that the teacher who seeks to initiate educative transformations in students should possess 'pedagogical tact', which involves the ability to improvise (p. 129), the willingness to take risks (p. 130), and the readiness for 'engaging the learner's interrupted experiences by initially being open to the learner's frustrations and doubt about how to move on in the learning process' (p. 131). In more concrete terms, English recommends that the teacher learn to ask 'difficult questions' (p. 136) in order to spur on such interruptions while simultaneously practicing a form of listening she calls 'educative listening' (p. 139). Educative listening is attentive to the struggles and challenges that the student will inevitably encounter in the transformative process, and open to learning how he or she might proceed from her students' reactions. For English, this means opening up a 'dialogic space' in which a special form of educational trust can form between teacher and student (p. 146).

With these several concepts and ideas, English provides her readers with some helpful pedagogical resources for taking up the task of transformative learning. Dialogue, trust, questioning and listening—in general terms, pedagogical tact—are undoubtedly crucial for directing the transformative process towards productive ends. At the same time, they too are somewhat formalistic, focused more on methods than on content. Because the psychological threats that negative experience poses to the student are quite serious, we believe more substantive pedagogical support is required. In moments of discontinuity, our standard ways of seeing the world and finding our way within it are challenged, negated, or shown to be invalid or incomplete. This is supposedly justified since it is only through such experiences that new perspectives and self-understandings can take the place of their antecedents. But what if the new self-understanding, the new order of things, never emerges? These frameworks of understanding, as Burbules (1990) points out, are invested with tremendous personal meaning and

significance, and they tie us to our home communities in important ways. Not only are such frameworks personally significant; they are what make human agency possible, as Charles Taylor (1989) observes, since they provide our various self-conceptions and life-courses with a concrete sense of direction and social meaning. The loss of such existential supports without replacement can therefore have personally devastating consequences. For Taylor it is to undergo a serious form of ‘identity crisis’ (pp. 27–29), and for Kemp (2015) this abandonment of basic personal values and ideals for the sake of transformation can mean a kind of ‘normative death’ (p. 395). As Burbules observes: ‘The problem here is that certain ways of viewing the world are invested with enormous significance (religious beliefs are a clear instance), and to challenge these is often to deprive students of an important source of security and significance in their lives The losses here are real, and it is not enough to tell oneself that it is for the student’s good’ (1990, p. 474).

Put in slightly different terms, transformative education has the potential to induce a kind of existential *trauma*, in which we lose touch with a coherent sense of self and an effective understanding of the world around us.⁹ Because of the gravity of this problem, we believe that students need a greater degree of guidance than the pedagogical tact and dialogic space that English recommends. One place to look for inspiration in conceptualising this support is in what we call the ‘moralistic’ view of transformation. Here challenging topics such as racism, sexism and social justice more generally are regularly grappled with in the classroom, and thus the problem of existential trauma is particularly acute. We will deal with the moralistic conception of transformation and its solution to the problem of transformative trauma in the following section.

TRANSFORMATION AS EMANCIPATION: THE MORALISTIC PERSPECTIVE

One way to address the prospect of transformative trauma that arises in the formalistic context is to turn to the ‘moralistic’ approach to transformative education. This perspective, held most often by theorists and pedagogues of a ‘critical’ or ‘social justice’ stripe, conceives of the transformative experience as possessing a highly defined telos—that is, a clear vision of what framework should replace the one that is problematised and negated in the transformative process. In other words, the ‘negative experience’ involved in transformative education is here supposed to motivate the individual to join together with others to work towards the realisation of a more just society. In this spirit, Megan Boler (1999) argues for a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’, an approach to social justice education she describes as simultaneously ‘an invitation to inquiry as well as a call to action’ (p. 176). By encouraging students to interrogate their ‘cherished beliefs and assumptions’ (*ibid.*) and especially the emotional reactions that inevitably occur in the process of self-interrogation (p. 178), Boler’s pedagogy of discomfort seeks to cultivate in students a ‘willingness to reconsider and undergo a possible transformation of [their] self-identity in relation to others and to history’ (p. 179). Giroux (1988) explains the goal of social justice

education in similarly transformative terms. For Giroux, the task of the critical educator is to ‘help students develop a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to overcome economic, political and social injustices’ (p. 127). Empowered by this faith, the student willingly accompanies the teacher in ‘struggling for a qualitatively better world for all people’ (p. 128). According to Giroux (2002), this means becoming a ‘transformatory intellectual’.

The reason for calling this approach ‘moralistic’ is not meant to be a polemical one, but rather to point out that the telos of social justice education is self-consciously normative, quite unlike the formalistic approach. On this view, transformation is a directed affair, a kind of conversion to a particular way of seeing the world, which simultaneously calls some of our deepest assumptions and self-understandings into question while encouraging us to embrace the project of eradicating injustice.

One prominent proponent of the moralistic perspective is the adult educator, Jack Mezirow, whose later ‘theory of transformative learning’ (2000) has become the paradigm-defining theoretical framework of adult education. In the early phases of its development, Mezirow is concerned to conceive of an educational approach which cultivates individual autonomy and self-determination in students as a precondition of social justice. He calls this ‘perspective transformation’ (1978).¹⁰ Drawing on Habermas, Mezirow (1981), associates perspective transformation with the emancipatory impulse in the human psyche. Hence his definition of perspective transformation:

Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these new understandings. It is the learning process by which adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them (pp. 6–7).

Thus for Mezirow, the relevant experience that one is to have in transformative education is one of being freed from the ideological ‘dependency roles and relationships’ that serve to oppress us. This emancipation was especially important for the women entering higher education in the 1960s and 70s, with whom Mezirow was working at the time. According to Mezirow, his students, who were struggling to take on new self-conceptions and leave behind their internalised feelings of inferiority, would need nothing less than a perspective transformation if they were to take advantage of their newfound opportunities.

Mezirow’s understanding of *how* such perspective transformation takes place is quite similar to that of both English and Koller, as each draws on the phenomenological theory of Gadamer and Husserl to some extent. Mezirow thinks perspective transformation is catalysed by what he calls a ‘disorienting dilemma’, a breakdown in our ability to make meaning of a certain aspect of experience. For Mezirow, all experience is constituted by a ‘meaning perspective’, ‘the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions within

which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's past experience' (p. 6). Mezirow sometimes speaks as if meaning perspectives fully 'determine how we think, feel and behave' (*ibid.*), but at other times he claims they determine only the 'horizon of our expectations' (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223). Because meaning perspectives are always partially constituted by ideological categories, which characteristically construe experience in rigid dichotomies and oppositions—student and teacher, male and female, friend and foe—meaning perspectives always fail to account for some recalcitrant aspects of our experience. In other words, pockets of meaninglessness always remain within a meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1981, p. 14). The sheer existence of pockets of meaninglessness does not guarantee transformation, however. Like the anomalies of Kuhn's paradigms, meaninglessness coexists alongside meaning, only becoming salient when accompanied by significant pressure, anxiety and conflict (Mezirow, 1978, p. 105). Sometimes this conflict occurs as a result of an uncontrollable event, such as the death of a loved one or loss of a job. But educators should not wait around for such crises to occur. Teachers should help instigate the disorienting dilemmas that help students to purge themselves of the 'reified power relationships', 'institutionalized ideologies' and 'internalized cultural myths' (Mezirow, 1981, p. 18) that inhibit their thought and action. Having mastered this deep form of criticality, students move toward 'greater autonomy and self-determination' and towards perspectives that are 'more inclusive' and 'permeable to allow access to other perspectives' (Mezirow, 1981, p. 9).

Although Mezirow's conception of the 'how' of transformation seems to place his theory of transformation directly in line with the formalistic approach, there is an important difference in the way he conceptualises its purpose. For Mezirow, transformation is a process in which we attempt to purge ourselves of some deeply internalised misconception or ideology, the uninhibited influence of which closes off possibilities for our thought and action. These possibilities are not merely alternative courses that our life may take, but rather opportunities that are necessary for our flourishing and that have been foreclosed on us by a hegemonic and oppressive mainstream culture. Therefore, Mezirow characterises the aim of transformation in explicitly normative terms, namely, in terms of emancipation.

The moralistic approach exemplified by Mezirow provides, as mentioned above, an important response to the problem of the bare discontinuity or transformative trauma that arose in the formalist approach. We have already seen one way it does so: in providing an ideological framework that is to replace the framework that is called into question in the transformative process. Yet this response is not wholly satisfying by itself. The experience of finding out that we not only live in a society that perpetrates grave injustices against vulnerable people, but that our own actions contribute to their misery can itself be a traumatic experience, so much so that it leads the individual to resignation rather than the motivation to rectify social wrongs. In response to this dilemma, the power of 'community' is a common refrain among social justice educators. Sonia Nieto (1999), to take one example (besides Mezirow), considers one of the central aims of her multicultural

courses to be creating classroom community. The classroom community, Nieto argues, is there to prevent students becoming ‘disheartened’ when dealing with emotionally demanding issues dealing with racism: ‘[R]acism can be described in ways that are overly contentious and destructive. . . . If a community is created in which all voices are respected, it seems to me that this is itself a noble first step’ (pp. 30–31).¹¹ Sheron Todd (2003) echoes this call: ‘Where ethical possibility lies’ for avoiding some of the inherent ‘violence’ of education ‘is in the everyday social relations that make up our classroom life’ (p. 146). Beyond the classroom community, several social justice educators, encourage teachers to build an even broader community environment that encompasses students, teachers, parents, and the larger social context of the school (McCaleb, 2013). These interpersonal community relationships are supposed to provide enduring support for the personal and structural change processes that the transformative classroom initiates.

While it seems to us that developing interpersonal community in these various dimensions should be part of the effort to support transformative education, it cannot be the whole answer. Transformative experiences often necessitate profound renegotiations of our relationships to our significant others, if not decisive breaks in these relationships. We have already seen Burbules make this point above. Because our relationships to family, friends and loved ones are based on values and self-understandings that the transformative process places under scrutiny, transformative experience challenges us to rethink at least some of these relationships. When we find that a relationship is based on a value that has proven to be no longer tenable after our transformation—when, for example, we realise that a friendship we hitherto maintained was based on mere social expedience rather than mutual respect and admiration—we are left with a choice. Either we must reform the relationship or, in some cases, we must decide to leave the relationship behind. When the former option is blocked—because the other person does not want the relationship to be renegotiated—remaining bound to the person thus can impede the success of the transformative process. In other words, there is an important limitation in the support an interpersonal community can provide.

Another limitation with the moralistic approach is its close association of educationally valuable transformative experience with the effort to realise more socially just political circumstances. While such efforts are noble and important, this instrumentalisation of transformative experience to social justice is problematic for several reasons. First, transformations directed at different ends than social justice are also of educational value—such as those that lead to, say, a greater appreciation of music or nature. Second and somewhat paradoxically, transformative educational contexts directed at these other ends can also contribute significantly to improving social justice. As an example, developing an aesthetic appreciation of beauty can contribute, albeit indirectly, to sensitising the individual to the ugliness of social injustice. Third and finally, at least some of the value of transformative experience is contained in the experience itself. The experience of inhabiting a new self-understanding or perspective has what Laurie Paul

(2014) has called *revelatory value*. We can value the revelation that occurs in transformative experience for its own sake.

A final problem with the moralistic approach lies in its understanding of appropriate methods for transformative learning. In particular, as we saw in formalism, the moralistic perspective tends to dichotomise transformative and non-transformative forms of education. In moralism, the non-transformative option is often branded as ‘ideological’, ‘hegemonic’ or ‘neoliberal’. Not only can such rhetorical moves veil political motives that are wholly exterior to the subject matter, thus sacrificing the individual’s education all-too easily to larger social projects (as important as they are), we have shown that there are ways to learn in an ‘additive’ manner that are essential to transformative experience (for example, honing). Not only is it inaccurate simply to chalk up these forms of learning to ideology; we argue in the next section that they are part and parcel of an alternative conception of transformative education.

TRANSFORMATION AS RENARRATIVATION: THE SUBSTANTIVIST ALTERNATIVE

Is there an approach to transformative education that can avert the dangers of trauma and identity crisis lurking in the transformative educational project? Can we overcome the dichotomies of additive learning and transformative learning that are common to both the formalistic and moralistic conceptions? What is the normative basis of transformative education if not the realisation of social justice? It is our belief that the problems that arise in the formalistic and moralistic conceptions of transformative education stem from an insufficiently *substantive* understanding of the experience of transformation. That is, transformative experiences in education should be thought of as moments in which we make contact with substantive ethical goods which, owing to our previous habits of thinking and acting, had remained out of our reach. The transformative experience is, in other words, an occasion in which some new ethical good emerges into our existential purview for the first time, or in which an only implicit and inconsistently practiced ethical good becomes substantiated—that is, it becomes concrete, momentous and existentially meaningful for us. The substantivist understanding of transformative education asserts, with the moralistic conception, that transformative education is an unavoidably normative project, and yet it derives this normativity from the subject matter with which the transformative experience is to take place, rather than importing it from an external social imaginary. In doing so, it proposes an educational process involving two foundational moments: (1) a moment of *articulation*, in which the learner comes to re-narrate her life story through new categories of experience, and (2) a moment of *aspiration*, in which the learner recognises the value of these new categories and strives to realise their ethical implications in his or her life. As an important corollary, substantivist transformative education carries with it an ‘aspirational’ conception of educational community, whose bonds extend beyond those constituted by interpersonal relationships and unite individuals with common ethical

aspirations. In these ways, substantivism offers a solution to the problem of transformative trauma.

As we see it, the most fruitful point of departure for developing such a 'substantivist' understanding of transformative education is Charles Taylor's philosophy of language.¹² There are several resources Taylor's philosophy of language provides for sketching out the substantivist alternative. The first is his concept of articulation. Taylor (2016) defines articulation as a specific type of expressive act whereby an agent brings a given phenomenon X into view for the first time in such a way that 'the domain so disclosed is figured by language, whether this be by metaphor, or analogy, or creative extension of existing terms, or whatever' (p. 178).¹³ Similar to the formalistic account of negative experience, what leads us to an act of articulation is the need to explain an encounter with a phenomenon that is unfamiliar to us and causes a feeling of tension, 'the feeling that there is something which language does not directly contain, but which the [mind], spurred on by language, must supply' (p. 177). Not every conceptual mediation of an encounter with the unfamiliar counts as an articulation for Taylor. Rather, in a true articulation, the new word or meaning must 're-gestalt' or essentially alter the nature of the entire field of objects in an agent's experiential horizon. In other words, articulation is a specific type of learning that alters our 'shape of meaning'. As Taylor writes:

Prior to the articulation, the as yet unnamed import [of the encounter with the unfamiliar] may be felt in a diffuse, unfocused way, a pressure that we can't yet respond to. After articulation, it becomes part of the explicit shape of meaning for us. As a result, it is felt differently; our experience is changed; it has a more direct bearing on our lives (p. 180).

The 'pressure' Taylor is referring to is reminiscent of (though not identical to) the irritations and disruptions that the formalistic perspective considered necessary for transformative experience. The lack of coordination between our linguistic appropriation of our surroundings and the inexplicable X in our experiential purview is, for Taylor, a potentially productive educational moment. It can reform our shape of meaning. With this formulation, Taylor's account shows continuity with Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, with its understanding of transformation as reactions to structural gaps in our extant meaning perspectives. It is the second element of Taylor's philosophy of language that begins to distance his contribution from the previous two approaches to transformation, however. Of key importance for Taylor's conception of articulation is the 'medium' in which he sees it taking place. According to Taylor, an attempt to articulate the unfamiliar always takes place in the context of a life *narrative*. Put differently, articulations characteristically recast our life narratives. This renarration is no accident but is rather a core feature of the articulation. In fact, the occasion of the new narrative just *is* the articulation. Without it, the linguistic basis of the articulation remains meaningless.

To convey the insight [that emerges in articulation], we can't simply rely on the formulation, but must somehow convey the experience, the felt intuition. This throws us back into narrative: the narrating, first, of the episode; but then also of the key features of our preceding life against whose background the episode had the meaning and the impact that it did (p. 302).

Thus, articulation is not merely a matter of learning new words to describe our experience, of finding names for the unfamiliar or the unknown. Articulation implies *renarrativation*. The life narrative acts as sort of 'bridge', as it were, between the negative experience and the successful cognitive accommodation of the foreign element that has emerged in our experience.

Understanding transformation as (re)narrated experience begins to point the way to how the problem of transformative trauma might be avoided.¹⁴ As Rahel Jaeggi (2014) points out, the life narrative is crucial for maintaining the unity of the self through discontinuous experience and transformation. 'The self's continuity in such transformations depends . . . on being able to integrate the succession of changes among projects or commitments. . . . Crucial here is whether one can make sense of the process—i.e. the transformation that has led from one condition to another—and integrate it into one's own life history or self-conception' (p. 176).¹⁵ It is when this renarrativation fails, or never takes place at all, that trauma, identity crisis and, in Jaeggi's terms, alienation can occur.¹⁶

As an example of this, Jaeggi discusses a character she calls the 'giggling feminist', who finds herself falling into patterns of 'feminine coquetry' that her feminist ideals consider repugnant. In spite of her explicit rejection of such behaviour, as well as the conception of the woman that underlies it, she cannot seem to stop herself from playing the coquette:

She has long understood that the idea that women must present themselves as cute, petite, and harmless in order to be attractive is the projection of a world dominated by men. Yet, as she discovers to her irritation, she constantly falls back into these patterns of behavior against her will. . . . It triggers in her a feeling of disconcertedness when she sees herself behave in such a manner: 'That can't be me' (p. 100).

Jaeggi portrays the character of the giggling feminist as a paradigm example of self-alienation, a loss of internal coherence: 'Formulated somewhat dramatically, it is as if in her giggling something were speaking through her that is not herself' (*ibid.*). Extending this analysis, the giggling feminist appears to us to be a particularly clear example of transformative trauma—a half-completed transformation that has halted on a bare discontinuity between the new feminist ideals she hopes to embody and her current ways of thinking and acting. In this case, self-ideal, self-conception, and her current self have all come into conflict. Operating in the terms of the formalist view, we might say that this conflict is part and parcel of the transformative process. After all, the feminist has become a more reflective and thoughtful person, who understands the nature of sexism and can resist it. Yet, at the

same time, she is presented with a serious existential challenge, and it would be a mistake to assume that her disruption or irritation is bound to prove its educational necessity in the long run. The moralistic approach suggests other modes of providing support, namely, the new ideological framework of feminism itself and interpersonal community. In the first case, we can see that the ideological framework is a poor support for her transformation, as it is one of the constitutive elements of the problem. In the second case, though interpersonal community is an important part of the picture, such communities are inherently limited in transformative contexts, as we have seen, because they involve relationships that are themselves the content of the transformation. If the feminist's friends harbour some of the covertly masculinist values she is trying to leave behind, they may only get in the way of her transformation.

Following a substantivist account, what was missing during the feminist's transformative process was the formulation of a new narrative which reconciles the change of heart she is going through with the self she cannot help being. Without this renarrativation, the situation becomes precarious. As Jaeggi (2014) puts this, '[i]f someone is unable to do this and experiences unbridgeable discontinuities, among which no connections can be made, that can be described as a form of self-alienation' (p. 176).

At this point, we can conclude that experiential discontinuities, if they are not to lead to trauma and alienation, should be understood as, at root, narrative phenomena. Put differently, if Taylor is right about the narrative quality of transformative experience, then we can say that one key way educators can support the transformative process is to provide students with resources for renarrating their life stories in light of the changes they are undergoing. One concrete method of doing so is, simply, giving students access to narrative accounts of others who have successfully grappled with similar experiential struggles.¹⁷ Even in technical and natural science contexts, academic disciplines that emphasise the human, narrative element of learning can be of tremendous value. One concrete place we see this approach taken is in the medical humanities. Here medical students are given opportunities to read autobiographies about medical practice and education in order to create a space for reflecting on the tremendous emotional difficulties of their training (Charon, 2004; Cruess and Cruess, 1997; Monrouxe, 2010; Wear and Castellani, 2000). Such emotional difficulties can and do regularly lead to trauma and cynicism about the medical profession (Coulehan and Williams, 2001; Flaherty, 1990; Hojat *et al.*, 2004; Kay, 1990). The substantivist account of transformative education thus argues that exposing students to actual or imaginative first-person accounts of experiences that are similar (in some relevant sense) to those they are themselves going through is essential—both as an enrichment of their educational experience and as a buffer against the problem of transformative trauma. Alternatively, students may be encouraged to produce such narratives themselves. Typically, though not always, this will mean drawing from works of autobiography, film, novels, narrative history, the perspective of significant role models, or literature.¹⁸

Yet the substantivist approach to transformative education goes beyond affirming the value of narrative *tout court*. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor points to the particular value of narratives that contain *moral sources*, substantive ethical goods that provide orientation and direction for our lives. According to Taylor (1989):

Moral sources empower. To come closer to them, to have a clearer view of them, to come to grasp what they involve, is for those who recognize them to be moved to love or respect them, and through this love/respect to be better enabled to live up to them. . . . This may come about through recasting our lives in a new narrative, as with Augustine's *Confessions*, or through seeing our struggle through the prism of Exodus, as with the civil rights movement in the America in the 1960s, or in innumerable less famous and fateful places in which people understand their lives through a new story (pp. 96–97).

What Taylor seems to be saying is that for the dawn of a new category, idea or value to matter to us in the way his philosophy of language requires—that is, for it to become an enduring source of change that transforms our life narratives—it must cause us to *aspire* to its realisation. This is the second moment of substantivist transformation: the occasion of *aspiration*. In other words, while one side of the psychological bridge from discontinuity to transformation rests upon narrative, the other rests upon aspiration. More concretely, one way of understanding the giggling feminist's predicament is that her desire to become a consistent and self-confident woman remains just that, a mere longing that lacks a firm grip on her moral psychology. She needs not only a new narrative, but one that inspires her to the ideals she can as yet only cognitively affirm. In the medical humanities, students need access not just to any narrative about the challenges of being a doctor, but one that provides guidance in how to maintain integrity in spite of them. Their cognitive affirmations of the Hippocratic oath and the ideals of medical care thereby receive a psychological boost.

When such cognitive affirmations become, via narrative, full-blooded aspirations, our motivation changes its constitution in an important way. As Agnes Callard (2018) points out, aspiration implies that we are not only witness to an experience of some new value or ideal, but we are *gripped* in such a way that we 'work to care about (or love, or value, or desire . . .) something new'. Callard continues: 'The aspirant sees that she does not have the values that she would like to have, and therefore seeks to move herself toward a better valuational condition. She senses that there is more out there to value than she currently values, and she strives to come to see what she cannot yet get fully into view' (p. 6). In this way, aspiration is the special form of agency by which we come to embody new values and self-ideals.

Another account of the nature of aspiration can be found in Jonathon Lear's (2014) *A Case for Irony*, and this account opens up some of the pedagogical implications of the aspirational moment. Lear argues that the desire to take on a new valuational standpoint toward the practices and

subjects we care about can emerge suddenly, in a moment of insight. Grading student papers one evening, he realises that he has been falling short of the true significance and meaning of teaching. It occurs to him that his prior identity as a teacher falls short, or is not obviously connected to, an ideal of teaching. With respect to this ideal, he has been just ‘going through the motions’, mindlessly accepting and enacting established norms of the teaching practice. As he describes the moment:

I am *struck* by teaching—by an intimation of its goodness, its fundamental significance—and am filled with longing to grasp what it is and incorporate it into my life. I can no longer simply live with the available social understandings of teaching; if I am to return to them it must be in a different way (p. 20).

Lear’s account yields, we believe, two important insights into substantively transformative pedagogy. First, Lear shows that the occasion of aspiration (in contrast to the aspiration itself) can strike us unannounced, in a kind of epiphany. While aspiration does not necessarily arise in this way, we think he is on to something here. From a pedagogical standpoint, if our goal is to engender aspiration towards the ideals and values of the subjects we are covering, then producing such epiphanic experiences will be an essential part of our transformative pedagogy. In other words, the transformative educator creates conditions—by selecting rich materials, using engaging presentation styles, as well as encouraging dialogues—for her students to be ‘struck’ by the goods of the subject matter she is teaching. Second, and equally as important, the transformative teacher is not only a creator of aspirational moments but is someone who must be, herself, open to the occasion of aspiration toward the ideals of teaching. Aspiration is a goal of the transformative classroom for both teachers and students.

CONCLUSION

Of course, there is much more to be said about the substantivist conception of transformative if it is to become a practice-guiding approach to transformative education. Nonetheless, we hope to have shown at the very least that there is a need for such an alternative and to have sketched out some of its broad conceptual and practical implications. Before closing out the essay, however, we would like to highlight one final point about the pedagogical implications of substantivism. In the foregoing account, there is an emphasis, perhaps an overemphasis, on the individual process of transformation. While the individual should be front and centre in transformative education, we would like to urge the importance of a special kind of community for undergirding the transformative process. When we are struck by an insight into the substantive goods of subject matter, we are simultaneously joining a group of individuals who share this very insight—that is, those who have come to appreciate the beauty of mathematics, the truth of poetry, the power of science, or whatever the subject matter before us happens to reveal. In other words, we enter into an *aspirational* community, whose bonds extend beyond the spatio-temporal immediacy of interpersonal communities.

In our view, the classroom that strives to substantively transform their students will encourage them to see their efforts, not only as a process of lonely self-realisation, but as one of entering into aspirational communities. This extension of the idea of interpersonal community which we saw arise in the moralistic perspective promises to provide yet another bulwark against the prospect of transformative trauma. While the transformative project will still involve some psychological risk, we hope to have offered some ideas for averting it.

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NOTES

1. In this form, transformative education is radically opposed to the 'conservational' notion of education, according to which one of the central functions of education is to pass on various cultural values, practices and ideals. Famously, Freire argues for a radically future oriented form of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Not all understandings of educational transformation are as opposed to the 'conservational' side of education, as we argue in the final sections of this paper. Thank you to an anonymous referee for bringing this to our attention.
2. Although we argue these various accounts of transformative education demonstrate formalistic or moralistic features, the complexity of any one theory of transformative education often precludes a clean association with either view. Formalism and moralism are akin to 'ideal types' which implicitly inform our thinking about transformation rather than constituting explicit doctrines to which any particular author subscribes.
3. Because this conception focuses on the cognitive *forms* that undergo change in the transformative process, the moniker 'formalism' seems to capture this perspective fittingly. This term is not meant as a polemical characterisation of this account; indeed there is much that is accurate in the formalistic account of self-change. Rather, 'formalism' is a descriptive term meant to highlight a common logic to be found at work behind some treatments of transformation.
4. For English as for Dewey, alienation is thus something positive, for it forces learners to confront 'the interruption of an encounter with the world' and thus introduces the 'possibility for educative transformation' (p. 99).
5. English adopts this terminology from Buck, 1969.
6. Because Koller's work is not available in English, we have translated all quotations from the book ourselves. In general, any quotation of a work in German in this essay implies that the translation is ours.
7. See Yacek, 2017, for a more extensive discussion of these various forms of transformative experience.
8. However, Koller, 2016, does remark in a recent essay that only certain transformations should be considered true '*Bildungsprozesse*', namely those that 'hold already articulated discourse conflicts open, or help conflicts that have not yet been articulated to find an appropriate language' (p. 159). Such conflicts arise when two fundamentally different ways of conceptualising experience encounter one another. Thus, Koller can distinguish between productive and destructive transformations, though he does not provide readers with pedagogical insight into how one might pursue the one and avoid the other. One reason for Koller's silence on the pedagogical dimensions of his theory is that he is primarily attempting to formulate a conception of *Bildung* for use in developing methods for the qualitative study of biography, rather than for understanding educational

- environments in schools. While this is a valuable endeavour, the connection between *Bildung* with the things we do in schools is an important one.
9. See Yacek, 2019, for a further discussion of the problem of transformative trauma.
 10. In an attempt to expand his theory of perspective transformation into a general theory of adult education, Mezirow would de-emphasise some of the normative commitments of his early theory later in his career. Mezirow's 'theory of transformative learning' in its latest variations is almost indistinguishable from the formalistic account (Mezirow, 2000). On the development of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning, see the helpful Kitchenham, 2008.
 11. In more recent work, Andrea English too goes beyond her earlier focus on pedagogical tact and calls for teachers to take up the task of 'building community', by which she means working to create bonds between students so that each one feels like a 'participant in the growing democratic life of the classroom' (2016, p. 166). This later addition moves her theory closer to those of the present company.
 12. Taylor defends a 'substantivist' conception of liberalism in some of his political writings, arguing that democratic societies should (and inevitably do) defend substantive political and moral values. We are extending this nomenclature into education, as the place of political and moral values are equally important in the transformative process.
 13. Taylor makes a distinction between what he calls the existential domain and the accessive domain of language. To oversimplify, words falling under the accessive domain refer to objects that already exist, like rocks, trees, water, etc; words in the existential domain refer to objects that would not exist outside of human language and subjectivity, i.e. Democratic ideals, mathematics, art, etc. Given the different ontologies of objects in the accessive and existential domains, articulations occur differently in each. In the accessive domain, articulations are much less obvious and common. When they do occur, it is because a radical shift in our theoretical accounts of how the world works is required in order to increase the scope of our explanatory capacities and manipulative power. Taylor seems to think that, in the existential domain, articulations are more obvious and common since the ontology of objects here is much more fluid. However, this may not necessarily be the case in a specifically educational environment.
 14. Koller also recognises the important connection between narrative and transformation. The central concern of his discussion is, however, the role which narrative identity should play in the empirical 'reconstruction' of transformative educational experiences, rather than the pedagogical initiation of such experiences (2012, p. 42f).
 15. I have slightly amended the translation within the dashes. The original German uses the term 'Transformation' which the English translation renders 'changes' (Jaeggi, 2005).
 16. According to Jaeggi, alienation is a disruption in our ability to appropriate the roles, responsibilities, expectations and ideals that make up our life—that is, it is a disturbance in the self-world relation, a breakdown of identification between the self and its world (see Jaeggi, 2014, p. 36).
 17. The qualifier 'similar' should not be understood too narrowly here. Allegories and fictional stories can be just as powerful as first-hand accounts of identical experiences.
 18. This aligns substantivism with the educational theories of other defenders of the educational importance of narrative—Maxine Greene, Martha Nussbaum and Alasdair MacIntyre, among others.

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