

## **BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT EDUCATION: PART ONE, ASSUMPTIONS, DEFINITIONS, AND CRITIQUES**

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### **Abstract**

Human resource development (HRD) as a scholarly endeavor and as a practice is often criticized in the adult education (AE) literature and by AE scholars as manipulative and oppressive and, through training and other interventions, controlling workers for strictly economic ends (Baptiste, 2001; Cunningham, 2004; Schied, 2001; Welton, 1995). Similarly, although less vocal and antagonistic, HRD scholars have been critical of AE's 'academic' and 'theoretical' elitism vs. the pragmatic and socially responsive practice of AE. To address the tension resulting from the lack of harmony between the disciplinary conceptual foundations that exists between HRD and AE, and assuming this tension results in a lack of understanding and possible beneficial cooperation, we propose that critical traditions (critical theory and criticality) may provide a bridge between the two disciplines. To fully define and provide support for this proposition, this paper is divided into and presented in two parts.

### **Overview of Parts One and Two of Bridging the Gap Between Human Resource Development and Adult Education**

Bridging the gap between human resource development (HRD) and adult education (AE) is a two part paper that describes the gap that has developed between the disciplines of AE and HRD, the conflicts this gap has created, and how critical traditions (critical theory and related concepts) might address this conflict. Part One offers general assumptions that guide this discourse. This is followed with a discussion of the metaphor of a bridge and that the bridge between HRD and AE is critical traditions, or criticality. A general description of the theories and conceptual frameworks that have traditionally kept AE and HRD at odds with one another as disciplines is presented. We then construct an explanation of critical traditions and how it has been discussed in HRD and AE with a view toward critical theory as espoused by theorists associated with The Frankfurt School. Next we describe the current thinking and growing interest in critical theory within HRD. We conclude Part One with several issues if the two disciplines remain disconnected and possible venues where AE and HRD may bridge the divide in practice.

Part Two, which will be published in *New Horizons* 20(3) discusses the critical turn in AE and HRD, how the two disciplines might be better connected, and how constructing a bridge between them through critical traditions is possible. Part Two concludes with a summary and an overall summary and conclusion of Parts' One and Two.

### **Introduction to Part One**

HRD and AE have a long and tenuous love-hate relationship. Using Watkin's metaphor of a marriage (see Belzer, Bierema, Cseh, Ellinger, Ruona, & Watkins, 2001), the two are presently teeter-tottering between divorce and reconciliation. There are periodic ideological skirmishes, followed by both sides retreating to their respective conceptual and practical corners, until the next conflict arises through an academic department or program merger, or a scholar 'lobbing one over the bow' of another. But like a marriage that has gone on too long without an intervention, it is time that the underlying reasons for this conflict are examined, or at the very least exposed and acknowledged.

HRD as a scholarly endeavor and practice has been criticized in the AE literature as manipulative, oppressive, and, through training and other interventions, controlling workers for strictly economic ends (Baptiste, 2001; Cunningham, 2004; Schied, 2001; Welton, 1995). Fenwick (2004) added that AE theorists have taken up an antagonistic position towards HRD. The reasons for this disapproving analysis, while not completely valid, include the assumption that HRD's primary conceptual foundations are being performative and based solely on human capital theory that tends to situate humans within a rubric of expendable resources, although the fact is that HRD is multidisciplinary including theories such as sociology and ethics. Additional support for this critique comes from an assumption that HRD as a whole is embedded within a rational/functional paradigm that tends to support any means to profit over democratic or humane treatment of people in the workplace. While the validity of these assumptions is not the focus of this paper, an effort to clarify the conflict between the two disciplines will address some of these claims.

To deal with the tension resulting from a lack of harmony between disciplinary conceptual foundations that exists between HRD and AE, and assuming this tension results in a lack of understanding and possible beneficial cooperation, this article provides a description of a recent development within HRD that has the potential to narrow the espoused rift between AE and HRD. This development is Critical HRD (CHRD) as espoused by Fenwick (2004, 2005), Elliot and Turnbull (2005) and others. As summarized above, we begin by describing five general assumptions that will guide this discourse. Next, the common metaphor of a bridge is discussed, with critical theory being the 'bridge' between HRD and AE, and offering a definition of 'bridgework' that supports our assumptions.

We follow this discussion of bridging with a general description of the theories and conceptual frameworks that have traditionally kept AE and HRD at odds with one another as disciplines. A description of critical theory in general and within AE is then presented, focusing on critical theory as espoused by theorists associated with The Frankfurt School (we make no claim that all theorists associated with the Frankfurt School agree with one another). Next we describe the current thinking within the growing interest in critical theory within HRD. We

conclude by describing several potentialities if the two disciplines remain disconnected and venues where AE and HRD may bridge the divide in practice.

### **General Assumptions**

To guide our discussions in Parts One and Two, we provide five general assumptions that undergird our concepts, arguments, and propositions: (a) the rift between HRD and AE, (b) their being separate but related, (c) theory and theory development being important to both disciplines, (d) theory and practice being inextricably linked, and (e) critical theory is also not without its own critique.

*1) A genuine and growing rift between HRD and AE exists in scholarship and practice.*

Many AE scholars continue to publish and support a marginalization of HRD that results in “little space on the [Adult Education] agenda for HRD...[and] Conversations about HRD tend to be less constructive than combative” (Belzer et al., 2001, p. 2). Although less vocal and antagonistic, HRD scholars have been critical primarily of AE’s ‘academic’ and ‘theoretical’ elitism versus the pragmatic and socially responsive practice of AE. Belzer et al. (2001) stated that “critical reflection on the profession's behavior toward and treatment of HRD is imperative. By silencing this increasingly important aspect of adult education, we are doing a disservice to the profession, students, and most importantly stakeholders in the educational process” (p. 2).

In practice, HRD and AE have separate practitioner conferences, separate journals, and even separate practice contexts. For example, adult educators may be involved in community actions that HRD practitioners would find interesting but insignificant. To the best of our knowledge, no scholar or practitioner has vehemently questioned, opposed, or debunked any possible rift between HRD and AE. We believe this is a rift that needs to be carefully attended to, making sure this is the direction we want to proceed in, or think of ways to change the direction by creating a “gathering place” wherein critical ideas for practice, theory, and research can coalesce for the common good. If this rift is truly about theoretical claims, then critical theory provides an intellectual and practical space to muse and ruminate on those issues. However, if the rift is about other undisclosed or unspoken issues such as turf, identity, and so forth, then a critical perspective is unlikely to ‘heal’ such tensions. At least, that is, until folks are explicit about their intentions. If this is the case, then maybe we should accept that a divorce or separation between HRD and AE is needed and continue to move forward or focus more on how to best effectively work for the sake of the students – the offspring and intellectual progeny of both disciplines.

This begs the question, who is driving this rift between AE and HRD? The classical questions of “who defines, who legitimates, and who controls?” are all apropos to our discussions. Are practitioners defining this separation? Or, is this mostly occurring within the realms of intellectual discourse? If this rift is occurring only in the academic realm, then we should heed Newman’s (1994) caution of carefully defining the enemy so that we use our sacred time and scarce resources as academics to work on changing only those issues in society that really matter (i.e., bringing about a more just and equitable social structure and defending the Habermasian *lifeworld*). We believe that not addressing this separation is folly; if the disciplines

ignore this rift between theory and practice, then the consequences may be dire for one or both of the professions' scholars, practitioners, and students.

*2) AE and HRD are separate but related.*

AE and HRD, for all intents and purposes, operate as separate disciplines and fields of study and research. Yet, they recognize that they do in fact share histories, and many theories, concepts, and contexts. This is especially true for adult basic education and workplace education programs designed to help people enter or stay in the workforce. Also, while HRD and AE have separate research journals, and there is a stream of published scholarship acknowledging a disconnect between the two disciplines, many scholars conduct research and publish across both disciplines.

In many AE circles, it would be contrary to accepted belief to voice or write that HRD and AE are separate fields. Conversely, assuming there is a healthy marriage between the two disciplines would be reckless. Nonetheless, it does help if both disciplines acknowledge that though we draw from several different areas of study and research, we do indeed still share historical events and people, common contemporary contexts, and more than a few theories and worldviews. Thus, we do have a unique relationship, a special bond.

*3) Theory and theory development are important to both disciplines.*

Kurt Lewin's (1952) oft-cited quote "There is nothing as practical as a good theory" (p. 169) is applicable to both AE and HRD. Even though we are not creating theory as such, we are interpreting and applying critical theory in an attempt to create a space where AE and HRD can amalgamate and find common ground.

Theory development in HRD has been a source of much recent discussion and scholarship. Like AE, HRD is an applied discipline where the practice of HRD is the context in which theory is tested and developed. Examples of theory building include Lynham (2002) who developed a general theory building method for HRD and Storberg-Walker's (2006) work developing specific HRD theory. However, it could be argued that the approaches to developing theory, as Sambrook, Turnbull, Rigg, Stewart, Trehan, and Hatcher (in Stewart, Rigg, & Trehan, 2007) and others have suggested aims to treat HRD as any other "natural phenomenon by conducting positivist research" (Sambrook, 2007, p. 26).

Adult educators employ, extend, and develop theory in a number of ways. The theory developed in AE mostly guides research and informs the research and practice of educating adults and facilitating adult learning. Adult educators draw upon interdisciplinary social theories (e.g., critical, feminist, postmodern/structural), traditional educational theory (e.g., behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism) and/or a wide variety of disciplinary specific theories. Foley (2004) argues the following:

The overwhelming majority of US Adult Education scholars work within the positivist an/or the interpretive paradigms. Critical scholarship is growing, but it continues to be marginalised in the US Adult Education academy. Further, US critical scholars tend to work with a theory that emphasises culture, ideology and discourse rather than politics and economics. In other parts of the world, including Europe and Latin America, there is

a much more developed body of critical Adult Education scholarship, much of it springing from the work of activist adult educators. (p. 15)

For both AE and HRD theory may be used to understand, explain, or predict phenomena at the societal level (macro) or at the individual or group level (micro). Theory can also inform how we situate ourselves within the enterprise of education. “Social theory,” as Chapman (2005) explains “is a collection of overlapping, contending, and colliding discourses, or ways of speaking, thinking, and acting, that tries to reflect explicitly on how social life is constituted and to make social practices intelligible” (p. 308). Chapman, who situates herself and theory as critical, contends that “the multiple discourses of critical theory... seek to make social life and practices not just intelligible but also better” (p. 308).

#### 4) *Theory and practice are inextricably linked.*

While theory and practice are seemingly intertwined, that relation has varying understandings based on one’s epistemological and ideological understandings. Cervero (1991), examining the meaning of the relationship between theory and practice in AE, identifies four possible views:

In the first view, Adult Education is carried out without reference to an organized body of professional knowledge and theory. The second view posits that a body of knowledge developed through the scientific process should be applied to practice so that practice can be improved. In contrast, the third view holds that the best way to improve practice is to uncover and critique the informal theory that practitioners use in their work. The fourth view presents a fundamental unity between theory and practice, highlights the ideological character of all knowledge, and argues that Adult Education can be improved by fostering emancipation. (p. 21)

Cervero’s (1991) fourth view brings to the fore the spirit of the critical tradition, and assumes that all knowledge in AE arises within the social relations of cultural production and reproduction. . . Therefore, all practice expresses a theory that relates to these processes and all development of theory must be seen as a form of social practice embedded in these processes. (p. 30)

Within this viewpoint, supporters would argue that, as the codified field of AE was formed, many marginalized perspectives along the lines of race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexual orientation, and so on were excluded. This is a reasonable assumption for HRD as well.

The relationship between theory and practice in the critical tradition can best be illuminated with the term *praxis*, which educator and thinker Freire (1970) defines as the “authentic union of action and reflection” (p. 48). The prominence of praxis within the tradition suggests the importance of reflecting on one’s own views and assumptions, engaging in critical discourse, and creating new knowledge. For Freire, knowledge assumes action. Cervero (1991) adds action that challenges present perceptions and practices:

The relationship between theory and practice must be negotiated by real people in real situations...[the] goal is to challenge those engaged in further developing AE as a field of study to think about their practices from a variety of theoretical positions. (p. 35)

We agree with the need for professions to view scholarship and practice from more than one point of view. HRD typically has not questioned the existing power and status of organizations, resulting in it playing a subservient role in many contexts within the organization. Additionally, we agree that Chapman's (2005) view of AE is also applicable to HRD. Both are just beginning to question the need for specific theories that might support research and help to explain the complexity of the workplace. "...I always had to borrow the theoretical framing from another discipline –sociology, geography, history, or anthropology—and that was when I realized how little theory education produces and how little of that emanates from AE: practically none at all" (Chapman, 2005, p. 309). The thrust of Chapman's argument here is that the field of education generally, and AE and HRD specifically, has contributed little to the ideas, concepts, and theories used by the major disciplines. For example, andragogy is rarely used as a major theoretical orientation in psychology or sociology.

Even in an early essay by Horkheimer (1972), which first mentioned critical theory being distinct and counter to traditional theory, his aim was a theory that is wedded to the evolution of a more just organization of life in society. Thus if, as Chapman (2005) suggested, theory does not 'travel', but is grounded in context, then we are faced with the dilemma of having few theories that might traverse and transcend these isolated contexts, and thus have the potential to become a core disciplinary theory. Critical theory, we believe, has this potential.

##### *5) Critical theory is not without its own critique.*

Critical theory is heavily criticized for a variety of reasons (i.e., issues of language, emancipation, negativity, essentialism, gender, race, and so forth). However, it serves as a viable springboard for identifying and resolving differences and developing future possibilities and potentialities between HRD and AE. Fenwick (2005) emphasized this potential in her criticism of organizations: "Clearly there exist theoretical and praxis dilemmas and 'deep contradictions in enacting critical HRD in contemporary organizations'" (p. 227). It is beyond the scope of this paper to do justice to the many and varied criticisms of critical theory; however, criticisms that seem especially pertinent to our discussion are language and feminism.

In the criticism of language in critical theory, the discussion around emancipation serves as an example. Habermas, a 'late' critical theorist, has been criticized for discussing language in terms of its grounding of common human understanding and normativity. Postmodernists in particular have a problem with consensus because it tends to exclude that which is different and, therefore, oppressive. Lyotard (1984) suggested that "seeking consensus is at least a kind of violence and perhaps even a terror that threatens to silence those who challenge the rules that constitute existing practice" (cited in Sitton, 2003, p. 101). Beyond this more general criticism of language as oppressive threat is the oft-cited metaphor of emancipation associated with critical theory.

Emancipation is a primary goal of critical theory. For Habermas, the linguistic turn was not a turn toward language, but more a turn away from "the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness" (Finlayson, 2005, p. 38), which in general terms meant a turn away from the oppression of logical positivism and Cartesian thought. Critical theory should liberate people from restrictive and oppressive traditions, "ideologies, assumptions, power relations, identify formations" and organizations (Alvesson, 1996, p. 19). However, emancipation has implications

that cause angst and bias interpretation within certain contexts. For management, it is not a valid concept because management's goal is to increase performance and productivity to bolster shareholder value. It also forces one to view work as oppressive, disallowing freedom and autonomy.

Feminists have levied several criticisms against critical theory. The first-generation of critical theorists were all male and made no efforts to explain women's oppression. Although second-generation critical theorist Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) referenced feminism as a new social movement, gender was nearly non-existent. Like critical theory, feminist theory is not a singular thought, as feminists disagree as to the primary causes of male dominance and female subordination. Yet, many would argue that critical theory neglects to recognize patriarchy as a source of domination and oppression. Also, critical theory's insistence that freedom and autonomy result in the isolated individual as the ideal end state (How, 2003) is an untenable situation to many feminist theorists.

In this section five assumptions that set the stage for the concepts, suggestions, and propositions for this and the second article were presented. We will now discuss the metaphor of bridges as a powerful concept that connects the separate realities existing between HRD and AE.

### **Bridges**

While there is a shared history and common interests between AE and HRD, the concept of a bridge explicitly articulates that the disciplines are now distinct with separate identities. By embracing critical theory/critical tradition as a bridge, the two disciplines have an opportunity to strengthen bonds that are currently tenuous and fragile. Drawing upon feminist literature, we understand a *bridge* as “connectors between separate spaces, realities, and consciousnesses” and *bridgework* as the “embodied practice of making those connections” (Malhotra & Perez, 2005, p. 48). The act of bridging by employing critical traditions creates a shared space that is simultaneously real and metaphorical, where researchers and practitioners from both disciplines can collectively work to envision new possibilities for individual, organizational, and societal change.

Bridging is a fluid process, not a permanent or fixed space. Scholars and practitioners can move in and between, redefine, or create new spaces. Bridgework is an act of courage, compassion, and commitment among adult educators and human resource developers. Constituents on both sides of the bridge are responsible for creating the necessary bridgework. The outcome of this effort is establishing community, revealing power, awakening consciousness, establishing collaborative thought and practice, and affirming ethical and political commitments.

It is our hope to begin a dialogue about bridgework utilizing critical theory and establish new coalitions among scholars and practitioners in AE and HRD. Borrowing from the words of feminist writer Anzaldua (2002), our aim is to move the conversation and engagement between the two disciplines from struggling over “the recognition of difference within the context of commonality” to “the recognition of commonality within the context of difference” (p. 2). That is, while wholeheartedly acknowledging our shared histories and varied differences, our goal is

to move toward a mutual and just space wherein we acknowledge our critical tradition, our criticality, as a bridge between AE and HRD. This can begin by reviewing the definition of both disciplines and also critical traditions.

### **Definitions: Adult Education, Human Resource Development and Critical Traditions**

To establish context and foundation for the arguments and proposition set forth in this discussion, and because of a general lack of agreement among AE, HRD and scholars and practitioners who embrace critical traditions on the definitions of these terms, it is important to define what we mean by AE, HRD, and critical traditions (critical theory). Several definitions are offered that we believe are applicable to our assumptions, discussions, and propositions.

#### *Defining Adult Education*

There are several definitions of AE, as the field is diverse and encompasses many perspectives. These definitions vary based upon variables such as (Merriam & Brockett, 1997):

- a) How adulthood is understood (an understanding of the term *adult*).
- b) The distinction between education versus learning.
- c) The intentionality of the activity.
- d) Philosophical underpinnings regarding the purpose and goals of education.
- e) The context of adult education.
- f) International understandings.

There is no singular/monolithic definition of AE that is commonly agreed upon. While HRD has historically been viewed by AE scholars within the context of work and the workplace, and within one major philosophical tradition (behaviorist), AE represents several contexts, including the workplace, and has multiple definitions based on varying philosophical stances (e.g., behaviorist, humanistic, liberal, progressive, radical, and so forth).

Scholars have refrained from an all-encompassing definition of adult education because of its complexity, depth, breadth, and the fact that definition depends on context and one's philosophical and conceptual point of view. Elias and Merriam (1980) stated "Even an attempt to define adult education presupposes philosophical questions" (p. 5). However, definitions still endure. Early in its history AE was defined by Lindeman (1926) in terms of lifelong learning:

A cooperative venture in non-authoritarian, informal learning, the chief purpose of which is to discover the meaning of experience; a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the preconceptions which formulate our conduct; a technique of learning for adults which makes education coterminous with life and hence elevates living itself to the level of adventurous experiment. (cited in Stewart, 1987, p. 12)

Other recognized definitions include Knowles (1980) who believed that AE is both a phenomena consisting of activities that speaks to the intellectual process through which adults seek, or are assisted to learn things, as well as a social system made up of individuals and organizations concerned with the education of adults. An international definition was developed in 1976 by United Nations Educational, Social, Cultural Organization:



. . . the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities as well as in apprenticeship, whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development. (p.3)

The landmark study by Johnstone and Rivera (1965) on the nature of AE in America suggested the purpose of AE is to acquire knowledge, information, or skill that includes some form of instruction including self-instruction (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Darkenwald & Merriam (1982) defined AE as "a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills" (p. 9).

Finally, Mezirow's (2000) definition is based on a critical stance and is, therefore, supportive of the propositions put forward in this article:

Adult education may be understood as an organized effort to assist learners who are old enough to be held responsible for their acts to acquire or enhance their understandings, skills, and dispositions. Central to this process is helping learners to critically reflect on, appropriately validate, and effectively act on their (and others') beliefs, interpretations, values, feelings, and ways of thinking. Our human need to understand our experience, the necessity that we do so through critical discourse, and the optimal conditions enabling us to do so freely and fully provide a foundation for a philosophy of adult education. (p. 26)

### *Defining Human Resource Development*

As stated above, HRD has historically been defined within the context of the workplace. It has also been defined as a part of human resource management (HRM). The two disciplines, however, have varied philosophies, theories, processes, and outcomes and may actually be incorrectly viewed as the same discipline. Hatcher (2006) indicated that while "some professionals distinguish a difference between HRM (a management activity) and HRD (the profession that develops learning and performance)..., neither term is well defined" (p. 92). The lack of clearly being defined and differentiated may explain some of the more fanatical criticisms of HRD by adult educators. The following definitions of HRD will hopefully mitigate such criticism by providing an understanding of the evolution of the discipline and its being distinct but also related to AE.

The first two definitions from Nadler (1970) and McLagan (1989) are probably the most well known and are commonly used especially by HRD practitioners and faculty.

Human resource development is a series of organized activities conducted within a specified time and designed to produce behavioral change. (Nadler, 1970, p. 3)

HRD is the integrated use of training and development, organization development and career development to improve individual, group, and organizational effectiveness. (McLagan, 1989, p. 7)

The next two definitions by Gilley and Egglund (1989) and Chalofsky (1992) provide a more humane and socially aware set of characteristics of HRD and reflect the evolution of the scholarly growth of the discipline.

HRD is organized learning activities arranged within an organization to improve performance and/or personal growth for the purpose of improving the job, the individual and/or the organization. (Gilley & Egglund, 1989, p. 5)

HRD is the study and practice of increasing the learning capacity of individuals, groups, collectives and organizations through the development and application of learning-based interventions for the purpose of optimizing human and organizational growth and effectiveness. (Chalofsky, 1992, p. 179)

Finally, the last definition by McLean and McLean (2001) represents what many HRD scholars believe is the most applicable definition and where the discipline has the highest potential for sustainable individual, organizational, and societal growth:

Human resource development is any process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop adults' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or group/team gain, or for the benefit of an organization, community, nation or, ultimately, the whole of humanity. (p. 322)

#### *Defining Critical Traditions (Critical Theory/Criticality)*

When we discuss critical traditions we are referring to a broad characterization that includes several concepts, such as critical theory, criticality, and other related critical viewpoints, and associated primarily with scholars allied with the Institute for Social Research, in Frankfurt, Germany, or the Frankfurt School as it has come to be known. Established in 1923 the Frankfurt School consisted of first generation thinkers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Friedrich Pollock, Leo Lowenthal, Erich Fromm, and Walter Benjamin, who significantly differed from one another, represented various disciplinary backgrounds, and aligned broadly with Marxism, but also drawing from other sources (see Bottomore, 1984; Jay 1996; Wiggerhaus, 1994). Within a decade of the Institute's opening, Nazism came to power and the political climate made it impossible to continue, as the members were engaged with Marxist thought and many were of Jewish descent. Several of the members emigrated abroad and eventually were able to continue their work in the United States.

Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse would engage in lively critiques with American social scientists, particularly the social science establishment that believed it could describe and measure aspects of human nature, such as John Dewey's pragmatism. In the early 1950s, the Institute for Social Research returned to Germany with three of its original members Horkheimer, Adorno, and Pollock. Marcuse continued in the United States as a professor at Brandeis and would later serve as a powerful voice of the New Left. Upon the Institute's return to Germany in the early 1950s, a second generation of theorists became involved, most notably Jurgen Habermas who was an associate of the Institute and did not wholly agree with the negative dialectic of Adorno, his mentor.

The general assumption is that there is a coherent body of thought for critical theory. This is far from the case. Given the varied disciplinary backgrounds and divergent thoughts of the

scholars associated with the Frankfurt School, “(a) there are many critical theories, not just one; (b) the critical tradition is always changing and evolving; and (c) critical theory attempts to avoid too much specificity, as there is room for disagreement among critical theorists” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2003, p. 435).

Even though a standardized body of thought does not exist, it is important for consistency to offer definitions and characteristics of critical theory that are appropriate for our purposes here. When we talk about critical theory (critical traditions), we are primarily drawing from the ideas of Adorno (1973), Horkheimer (1972), and Marcuse (1964) and the later ideas of ‘second generation’ thinkers Habermas (1984) and Honneth (1987). Unlike traditional social theory that seeks to explain society, critical theory critiques society in order to change it. Horkheimer (1972) distinguished critical theory as a radical, emancipatory form of Marxian thought, directed at the totality of society in its historical specificity (i.e., a critique of how society has come to be configured at a specific point in time). Critical theory attempts to integrate the major social science theories that will help grasp the major dimensions of society, especially economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and psychology.

Scholars would likely balk at over-simplifying critical theory. The novice, however, will gain a basic understanding with the following overview of its primary characteristics:

- a. The normal world is filled with inequities and exploitation, especially of minorities by majorities.
- b. Perceive and challenge dominant ideologies that enhance power, increase hegemony, maintain alienation.
- c. Understand the influence of history, social standing and culture on values, beliefs, and behavior (Brookfield, 2004).
- d. Critique dominant socio-economic theories such as capitalism that support performativity and worker control.
- e. Critical theory “seeks to highlight, nurture and promote the potential of human consciousness to reflect critically on oppressive practices. . . [enhance] autonomy and responsibility” (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996, p. 13), and, “reclaim reason and practice democracy” (Brookfield, 2004, p. 2).

Critical theory encourages us to understand facts in terms of the circumstances that produced them and their potential for emancipation and a better life (How, 2003). It opens up possibilities for real research, such as the examination of economic forces, and the ideas and psychic structures of those who create them and who are concerned with the relationship between knowledge and emancipation (How, 2003). A definition from Alvesson and Willmott (1996) with implications for both AE and HRD states that critical theory fosters:

...a rational, democratic development of modern institutions in which self-reflective, autonomous and responsible citizens become progressively less dependent upon received understandings of their needs, and are less entranced by the apparent naturalness or inevitability of the prevailing politico-economic order. To this end, critical theory encourages the questioning of ends (e.g. growth, profitability, productivity) as well as their preferred means, such as dependence upon expert rule and bureaucratic control, the contrivance of charismatic leadership, gendered and deskilled work, marketing of lifestyles. (p. 17)

Criticality, the phrase we will use for critical theory and critical traditions in the remainder of this and the next article (Part 2), offers AE and HRD common ground in which to discuss, critique, dialogue, and act in order to create more just, equitable, and responsible workplaces, communities, and societies. To enhance these general discussions and elementary conceptual understandings of criticality, we will next offer critiques that have been levied against HRD and AE.

### **The Critiques against Human Resource Development and Adult Education**

This section provides a general description of the theories and conceptual frameworks that have traditionally kept AE and HRD at odds with one another and still exist as contentious issues. The published critiques in both fields tend to be conceptual in nature. A brief review of the AE and HRD literature revealed no empirical studies that identify specific theories or points of view that might be construed as elemental in keeping the two disciplines apart. There are, however, a few publications that bring to light conceptual and theoretical differences. These critiques are summarized, along with a synopsis of applicable published responses, including our own. We begin with critiques levied against HRD.

#### *Critiques of Human Resource Development*

Several AE scholars have published critiques of HRD. These critiques can be categorized into two camps. The first is Social theory based critiques that includes (a) labor (Schied, Carter, & Howell, 2001; Spencer, 2001), (b) Labor Marxist (Baptiste, 2001), (c) Habermasian (Welton, 1995), (d) Post-Structuralist (Townley, 1994), and (e) Feminist (Hart, 1992; Howell, Carter, & Schied, 2002). The second is specific HRD critiques that includes, according to Fenwick (2004), (a) the field's supposed allegiance to human capital theory (Baptiste, 2001; Coffield, 1999; Collins, 1991), (b) the consequent commodification and subjugation of HRD to exploitive organizational interests (Cunningham, 1993; Fenwick & Lange, 1998; Hart, 1992; Howell, Carter, & Schied, 2002; Spencer, 2001), (c) the concomitant deployment of HRD technologies wielding soft control through surveillance, classification, normalization, deficit assumption, cultural engineering, workers' self-regulation, and learning demands (Fenwick, 2001; Schied, Carter, & Howell, 2002; Townley, 1994), and (d) the pre-emptive cringe (Coffield, 1999). There is no transparent definition of the concept pre-emptive cringe. Its usage is colored by one's political stance. In a vast majority of the popular political commentaries, pre-emptive cringe is understood as how a person, group, or entity intentionally choosing to kowtow to a powerful elite or a polarized issue for the sake of political expediency. Hence, it is used as a pejorative jab when one intentionally chooses not to stand up for what he/she believes and then acquiesces in the face of power. Yet, others believe that a pre-emptive cringe is a wise strategic ploy to deliberately accommodate the powerful in order to survive to fight another day. This second view and course of action is to prevent a negative professional or personal outcome for the sake of the larger good. In the Coffield (1999) article, the author believes that typical reaction of educators when negotiating and making demands of industry is to take the stance of a pre-emptive cringe. Coffield, thus, is putting forth a call to educators in Britain to stand up to business and advocate for a new social contract.

#### *Responses to the Critiques of Human Resource Development*

Our responses to the critiques of HRD are from our own expertise and from Belzer et al. (2001). Instead of responding to each specific critique, we will respond to the concepts and/or theories that undergird these critiques. First, several of the critiques focus not on HRD, but more on HRM. The responsibilities for personnel management (control) and benefits functions within organizations not a part of HRD as commonly defined. Thus, critiques such as those that assume HRD controls surveillance and classification within organizations are not valid. On the other hand, there are definitions that embrace personnel functions in a broad way; thus, this criticism may in fact apply.

Second, being critical of activities such as normalization and learning demands that are beyond the control of HRD are also questionable. Normalization and learning demands are culturally and nationally-grounded and imposed beyond organizational boundaries and, thus are forced on the profession and practice of HRD.

Third, the assumption that HRD's theoretical foundations are limited solely to economics and specifically human capital theory is inaccurate. HRD is a multidisciplinary profession and field of study based on such diverse theoretical foundations as adult learning, critical theory, and systems theory (Hatcher, 1999; Watkins, 1989), and such disciplines as sociology, psychology, and ethics (Jacobs, 1990; Swanson, 2001). Such a wide theoretical and disciplinary framework does not support AE's singular reliance on human capital theory and the criticism of HRD being a corporate handmaiden (Hatcher, 2002) and implicated in the control of workers (Schied, 2001). As emphasized by Fenwick (2005), "A critical Human Resource Development might establish itself as one among multiple paradigms coexisting in a pluralistic field" (p. 227). Many HRD-related publications are based on the conceptual foundations that use the language of human liberation versus human capital, not on the notion of efficiency or production. Examples include Brooks' (1994) research on power within teams, Chalofsky's (2003) examination of meaning of work, and Hatcher's (1999) contention that ethics must be a theoretical foundation for HRD and that HRD should be involved in workplace democracy (Hatcher, 2004).

Belzer et al. (2001) examined critiques of HRD as 'myths'. These myths included HRD professionals as capitalist sympathizers who embrace Pavolian behaviorism; that HRD has no ethics, and that HRD exploits the disenfranchised according to race, gender, and class. These myths are addressed by the authors using arguments similar to those we offered above in terms of HRD being based on multidisciplinary theories that encourage workplace democracy, ethics and social responsibility.

### *Critiques of Adult Education*

Defining AE is an important but disconcerting task. Who is considered an adult? What is the relationship between adult education and adult learning? How does the field distinguish itself from other related fields of practice – community based education, vocational education, health education, and, yes, HRD? Indeed, these are central questions for defining AE. Yet, no one definition is commonly agreed upon in the field. Upon tracing the historical development and underlying assumptions of numerous definitions, Merriam and Brockett (1997) "define Adult Education as *activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults* [emphasis in original]" (p.

8). This broad definition of AE, which can apply to multiple educational and social contexts, serves as the basis for our discussions.

Most fields of study and practice grapple with internal and external critiques. AE is no different. In recent years, adult educators have explored the relationship of theory and practice (Cervero, 1991; St. Clair, 2004), the professionalization of the field (Collins, 1991; Wilson, 1993), issues of difference, multiculturalism, and sociocultural context (Alfred, 2002; Grace & Hill, 2004; Guy, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, 2001; Tisdell, 1995), the inclusion of postmodernist perspectives in AE (Edwards & Usher, 2000; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997), globalization and the incorporation of AE (Hall, 2000; Holst, 2004; Jarvis, 2000; Merriam, Courtenay, & Cervero, 2006; Walters, 1997), and so on. The central critique of the field that has persisted since its inception centers on what is the primary mission of AE? Inherent is this longstanding question is whether or not AE is for individual or social change or both. This perennial debate over the mission and purpose of AE has direct implications, therefore, for HRD which to date has focused primarily on individual and organizational change.

The issue over the mission and purpose of AE simply extends to its sharp critique of HRD. Many scholars in HRD may easily, and possibly rightly so, construe the sharp focus on HRD as a direct attack or assault (see Fenwick, 2004, 2005). Yet, it should be noted that similar critiques regarding the purpose of education – as an emancipatory or hegemonic force – have been similarly vibrant internally within AE.

Critical analysis is healthy only if the entity being critiqued acknowledges and acts on recommendations. To date there is no empirical evidence that either AE or HRD has paid much attention to the criticism levied against them in any significant manner. From a conceptual point of view, critiques have served more to sustain disciplinary status quo than to build commonalities between the disciplines. In Part Two of this article we introduce the concept of critical theory to build a framework of understanding and serve as a bridge between HRD and AE.

### **Summary of Part One**

Part One of “Bridging the Gap between Human Resource Development and Adult Education” discussed the gap that has developed between the disciplines of AE and HRD, the conflicts this gap has created, and how critical traditions (critical theory) might address this conflict. Five general assumptions that guide this discourse (Parts 1 and 2) were described. The metaphor of a bridge was developed and indicating the bridge between AE and HRD was critical theory (criticality). Conceptual definitions of AE, HRD, and criticality were given, and followed with the critique of HRD and AE and how they are presently at odds with one another as disciplines

In Part Two we will discuss the critical turn in AE and HRD, and connecting AE and HRD by constructing a bridge between the two disciplines. Collectively, we trust this discourse will facilitate a recognition of the similarities rather than the differences and the need and benefit of critical reflection through greater collaboration.

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