

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT EDUCATION: PART TWO, THE CRITICAL TURN

Tim Hatcher

Associate Professor

Department of Adult and Higher Education
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, USA

Tuere Bowles

Assistant Professor

Department of Adult and Higher Education
North Carolina State University, Raleigh, USA

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). The reasons for this disapproving perspective are numerous and include HRD's primary conceptual foundations as being performative and based on human capital theory that tends to situate humans within the rubric of expendable resources. 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 treatment of people in the workplace. Similarly, although less vocal and antagonistic, HRD scholars have been critical of AE's 'academic' and 'theoretical' elitism versus 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 human resource development (HRD) and adult education (AE), and assuming this tension results in a lack of understanding and possible beneficial cooperation, we propose that the critical tradition (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. Part 1, titled "Assumptions, Definitions and Critiques" provides an overview of the two parts, the general assumptions that guide this discourse, a description of the common metaphor of a bridge, definitions of AE, HRD and critical theory, and a retrospective of critiques against HRD and AE. Part 2, published in *New Horizons* (Vol. 20(2)) and titled "The Critical Turn discusses connecting HRD and AE by constructing a bridge between the two disciplines, and concludes with a summary of Part 2, and an overall summary and conclusions of Parts 1 and 2.

The Potential of Critical Theory to Bridge the Gap Between Human Resource Development and Adult Education

As reflected in Part 1, AE and HRD are in constant conflict, comparable to a marriage where the two partners are teeter-tottering between divorce and reconciliation (Belzer, Bierema, Cseh, Ellinger, Ruona, & Watkins, 2001). 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, as emphasized in Part 1 of this article, it is time that the underlying reasons for this conflict are examined, or at the very least exposed and acknowledged.

The similarities between AE and HRD far exceed the differences. Five assumptions of the differences between AE and HRD were examined in Part 1 (the rift between AE and HRD, their being separate but related, theory and theory development being important to both disciplines, theory and practice being inextricably linked, and critical theory not being without its own critique), and, while the assumed differences do exist, they are the result of emphasizing the few differences and not the many similarities in theories, research and practice. What is needed is a bridge between AE and HRD, where scholars create stronger researched based theories, with practitioners being able to recognize greater collaboration and fewer areas of dissension. As stated in Part 1, "The outcome of this effort is establishing community, revealing power, awakening consciousness, establishing collaborative thought and practice, and affirming ethical and political commitments" (Hatcher & Bowles, 2006, p. 11).

We strongly believe critical theory can establish an effective working coalition among AE and HRD scholars and practitioners. Critical theory critiques social issues in order to change society's views of the issues. As summarized in Part 1, the primary characteristics of critical theory, also known as criticality are (a) its view of the world being filled with inequities and exploitation, especially of minorities by majorities; (b) challenge to dominate ideologies that enhance the power of majorities, increase hegemony, and maintain alienation; (c) attempt to influence the historical, social, and culture values, beliefs, and behavior; (d) critique of dominate socio-economic theories such as capitalism that support performativity and worker control; and (e) attempt 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, 2005, p. 2).

Critical theory provides the opportunity for joint AE and HRD research that examines the psychological, social, and economic forces impacting society, communities, organizations, and individuals (i.e., adult learners). It would create a common ground to discuss, critique, dialogue, and collectively advocate equitable and responsible workplaces that encourage and facilitate individual, group, and organizational learning. To accomplish this requires a critical turn of both AE and HRD from confrontation to collaboration and connecting their joint strengths for the common good – a strong and recognized profession that addresses critical issues through quality research and validated practices.

The Critical Turn in Adult Education and Human Resource Development

In this section we briefly review the emergence of critical theory in AE and HRD, discussing how it has been treated in the literature over time (both conceptually and empirically) and the concerns for future research and scholarship.

For scholars and practitioners who view the history and philosophy of AE within an emancipatory frame, a *critical turn*, per se, within the field is seemingly oxymoronic. Heaney's (1992) persuasive essay, "When Adult Education Stood for Democracy", invokes the remembrance of great giants in the field such as Lindeman, Dewey, Freire, and Horton who believed in education for a democratic and socially just society. Such emancipatory philosophical commitments are evidenced by the seminal practical works of Paulo Freire to adult literacy training in Brazil, Ivan Illich to radical educational reform via the Center for Intercultural Documentation in Mexico, Myles Horton to the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee, and Septima Clark to both Highlander and the larger Civil Rights Movement.

As the field of AE began to strongly professionalize in the U.S., emancipatory aims seemed to shift even further to the periphery (Collins, 1995). Subsequently, in an effort to build a professional brand and identity for the field of AE, Knowles's andragogy emerged as a prevailing discourse beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s that held sway for nearly two decades (see Elias & Merriam, 2005; Knowles, 1968, 1970; Merriam & Brockett, 1997). At the height of andragogy, the term was almost synonymous in some circles with AE. In Collins (1995) stinging critique of the coterminous nature of andragogy and the professionalization tendency within the field, he concluded that AE's "identification of the individualized learner as object (client) for professionalized practice, glosses over the failure to deal actively with those circumstances [in the lifeworld] which frustrate genuine 'self-directed learning'" (p. 80).

By the early 1990s andragogy was eclipsed as a dominant discourse and a return to possible critical theoretical discourses emerged. Welton (1995) certainly pointed this out in "The Critical Turn in Adult Education Theory." He commented, "... there have been rumblings in the margins of the field that the university-based study of AE has been professionally colonized, that the dominant paradigm, the 'andragogical consensus,' has crumbled" (p. 11). A widely recognized example of the critical turn is Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning, which embraced elements of Habermas's (1984) theory of communicative action.

Since this theoretical return to emancipatory roots, critical perspectives are clearly suffused within the formal AE literature base. The most evident domains include: a) adult learning (Brookfield, 2001; Collins, 1991; Hart, 1992; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Welton, 1993, 1995, 2005); b) adult teaching/pedagogy (Brookfield, 2005; Cunningham, 1992; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Horton & Freire, 1990; Tisdell, 1995); c) program planning (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Forester, 1989); and, d) multiple spheres of practice (Cervero, Wilson, & Associates, 2001; Sheard & Sissel, 2001; St. Clair & Sandlin, 2004). Undergirding these domains are recurring themes of power, knowledge, politics, positionality, multiculturalism, global political-economy, and ethical/moral considerations.

The critical turn in HRD recently emerged from several sources. First, HRD is influenced by critical management and criticisms of HR management within the UK and more recently in the US, and second from an influx of discipline-based scholars into HRD. Finally, since several HRD scholars and practitioners are grounded in AE, criticality as a core theory within the teaching of AE has influenced the emergence of critical approaches to HRD (Fenwick, 2005; Rigg, Stewart, & Trehan, 2007). It should be noted that to date the primary thrust of critical theory in HRD resides primarily within academia. Self-critics of foundational theories in HRD practice are not common, although there has been some discussion about *what* theories undergird HRD (Hatcher, 1999; Swanson, 2001). Additionally, Sambrook (2003) chastised HRD as failing to “raise ontological and philosophical questions” (p. 3) and Rigg et al. (2007) encouraged HRD professional to begin examining the outcomes of existing interventions that “have serious human and ecological consequences” (p. 3).

Led by publications by Alvesson and Deetz (1996), Alvesson and Willmott (1992), Deetz (1992) and others, critical theory, recognized as critical management studies (CMS) today, is a relatively small but important movement in business schools in the UK and of emergent relevance within US business schools. Since management is rife with issues of social, political, and economic power, it should be no surprise that management in general has been subject to criticism. But it was not until the 1990s that this criticism solidified under the umbrella of critical theory. CMS offers HRD illustrations of reconceptualizing the concepts of work, workers, power, and the role of HRD in workplace democracy, as well as encouraging dialogue amongst scholars and practitioners for a more critical approach to the discipline. HRD scholars from the UK and the US have published several manuscripts and scholarly publications. For example, UK scholars Elliott, Turnbull, Trehan, and Sambrook convened sessions on critical theory and HRD at the 2002 and 2003 Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), the professional organization for HRD scholars, annual research conferences, and in 2006 Sambrook and Hatcher presented an innovative session on criticality in HRD. There have also been similar sessions by scholars such as Trehan, Lee, and Vince at the annual European HRD research conferences sponsored by the University Forum for HRD and AHRD. The focus on these sessions was debate among scholars on critical thinking within HRD and questioning the assumptions behind the performative orientation that arguably dominates much HRD research and practice.

In addition, critical theory has been the topic of a modest but growing number of HRD-related publications. Examples include Trehan and Rigg’s (2003) chapter on the influence of power relations in shaping learning and the role that critical HRD may have in addressing these power relationships, Elliot and Turnbull’s (2005) edited book, *Critical Thinking in Human Resource Development*, and the recently published *Critical Human Resource Development: Beyond Orthodoxy* edited by Rigg et al. (2007).

In summary, critical theory has seemingly found a home in AE, but has just recently entered into scholarly and theoretical dialogue and debate within HRD. While obviously a topic of passionate discussion and growing interest, outside a limited number of conceptual papers and conference presentations, the growth of critical theory as a viable theory has yet to make significant headway within core HRD theory or research. To move critical theory into a more mainstream position, the potential activities and ideas that may serve to encourage this movement within AE and HRD are examined.

Connecting Human Resource Development and Adult Education: Potentialities and Challenges

There will always be detractors of AE and HRD purists who would insist that the two disciplines remain disconnected. Many HRD practitioners will continue to find little use for theory, and there remain those individuals in both disciplines who view questioning of the *status quo*, power, and/or position within organizations as heresy. Nonetheless, we believe there are positive benefits if AE and HRD coalesce around critical theory and that both disciplines benefit if the challenges that an adoption of critical theory poses are acknowledged.

The Consequences if AE and HRD Remain Disconnected

It is our contention that if the disciplines continue to venture in separate directions, then AE has the most to lose in terms of a student base and resources to maintain program areas, because a Darwinian marketplace effect would occur. As a practice, HRD is increasing, and the graduate programs emphasizing HRD are generally experiencing greater enrollments than AE focused programs. If the rift grows into a chasm, then AE runs the risk of becoming isolated, disconnected, unenamored, disenfranchised, disliked, or worse, AE and HRD becoming conceptual enemies with each side intending on winning. Based on recent history, AE programs are being diminished or closed, as are vocational education programs, while HRD programs are maintaining strong enrollments.

If either AE or HRD seeks to become victorious over the other, then the question becomes for what outcome? Certainly, neither students and new or even seasoned faculty nor society, communities, or the organizations that impact them would benefit. Frankly, the potential for an oppressive and fully corporatized ‘end-game’ is high if the two disciplines fail to overcome their differences.

Given the aforementioned discussion we contend that critical theory can become a “gathering place” and/or serve as the “umbrella” wherein new ideas of practice and thought can be nurtured and come to fruition. The primary benefit is that AE and HRD can reconceptualize their relationships and responses to changes in society (Milton, Watkins, Studdard, & Burch, 2003) as well as collectively respond to social, philosophical, and economic issues such as economic globalization, antiintellectualism, corporatization, western colonialism, and technology (Deetz, 1992; Hatcher, 2002). AE and HRD uniting under critical theory also provide a practical and conceptual challenge for students and faculty to think and act outside their comfort zone and disciplinary status quo. While it is unrealistic to think all HRD scholars would embrace critical theory in a positive light in terms of theory that informs their research or practice, we believe that it does provide HRD self-reflection to accurately and honestly view one of its more potent metaphors: competence, which is “crucial in presenting people as manageable commodities rather than unpredictable and self-willed agents” (Alvesson & Willmont, 1996, p. 28). Critical theory also has the potential for HRD to explore the centrality of metaphor, language, and communication within organizations, *a la* Habermas (1984).

We recognize that AE and HRD could potentially make ideal partners, or at the very least critical yet engaged and collaborative friends and scholars. In this new venture, what would such

a union be in actuality? Critical theorists would ask the standard proverbial question: Who benefits or whose interests are being served? Though there are no simple answers to this question, critical theory would provide a framework or gathering places to answer this question. We have identified several gathering places within various fields of academic study and practice where AE and HRD may benefit from mutual understandings of critical theory and critical theory in particular.

Fields of Academic Study and Practice: Programs, Faculty, and Students

As academic fields of study and practice, AE and HRD programs, faculty, students, and practitioners will benefit from the collaboration of AE and HRD through critical theory. Academic programs in colleges and universities seek to be viable enterprises. Thus, collaborating AE and HRD programs would build bridges within each program area. As cited in Milton et al. (2003), "Kreitlow identified a danger signal for [adult education] graduate programs as isolated from other disciplines . . ." (p. 25). Thus, at least within related fields of study and practice (AE and HRD), the vitality of both programs and disciplines will be strengthened by at least not becoming internally isolated from one another. It helps to diminish the "either/or" binary in terms of program focus, for example, either your program is HRD or it is for social justice/social action/social change. The combination creates a shared critical space. As further cited in Milton et al. (2003):

Comments such as 'We have split into two strong, even contested, orientations – HRD and social change/social action' increase the possibility of dissension and the potential loss of confidence by administrators as well as students. The particular focus of a program, whether one of social action, [developing people within organizations], or some combination, was an issue raised by a few participants in this survey and may warrant further study. (pp. 37-38)

Fields of academic study of the two disciplines benefiting from critical theory include programs, faculty, students, and fields of study. We choose to focus on programs, faculty, and students under fields of academic study because this is where most energy is expended in learning and research, thus impacting the extent that the two disciplines may coalesce around critical theory. The fields of study include the multitude of specializations and topics within AE. These include adult learning and development, adult basic education and literacy, and program planning. The fields of study in HRD include, but are not limited to, training and development, organization development, and career development.

At the academic program level benefits include:

1. Building bridges within program areas. Instead of remaining isolated, as Kreitlow warned (as cited in Milton et al., 2003) critical theory can help AE and HRD from becoming internally isolated from one another, and also externally isolated from other programs.
2. Diminishing the either/or binary in terms of program focus, for example, either your program is performative (HRD) or it is for social justice/social action/social change (AE). The combination creates a shared critical space. Milton et al. (2003) stated the either/or framework, "increases the possibility of dissension and the potential loss of confidence by administrators as well as students" (p. 37).

3. Reconceptualizing ourselves to be more responsive to change in society and in our fields. It provides for HRD to reinvent itself around workplace reform, democracy, and knowledge as contested terrain (Fenwick, 2005).
4. Providing a constructive space for engagement. Critical theory gives AE and HRD a shared space of voice and dialogue.
5. Increasing our image and relationship with administrators, based on AE and HRD having spaces of shared inquiry.
6. Strengthening both disciplines as connected, thus solidifying the fields of study.
7. Providing for more visibility within the academic and practitioner contexts of AE and HRD.
8. Offering fluidity of disciplinary definitions. It blurs the lines between the disciplines and offers interdisciplinary opportunities.
9. Offering the opportunity to help move AE and HRD in the right (ethical) direction by bridging the chasm that outsiders may view as nonexistent.
10. Providing a safe space to renegotiate power relations.
11. Providing the opportunity to create new curriculum (for example, critical HRD and CMS courses in US universities).
12. Offering a new “marriage of minds” around the curriculum (*a la* Watkins). We would become boundary spanners and bridge builders.
13. Strengthening the programs’ ability to become more responsive to change.

For faculty, the benefits around critical theory have the potential to create:

1. Changes in the discourse among colleagues in AE and HRD, authenticating new social interactions that are fruitful and useful for new knowledge creation (i.e., changing the discourse, culture, power relationships, and creating new knowledge).
2. Space for faculty to work on specialized issues and problems of interest. It would broaden faculty research streams and pool resources through collaborative research opportunities.
3. A reduction in the sense that faculty feel they are marginalized in AE and HRD. Critical theory creates a space in both AE and HRD research conferences for faculty to engage and be accepted.
4. The opportunity to expand the curriculum and program area.
5. The opportunity to interact globally with international colleagues working on critical theory, CMS, and other related concepts, thus strengthening international relations and reputations.
6. Increases in areas of potential publication and advancement of knowledge for faculty.

The beneficiaries of our programs and faculty efforts, our students, the benefits would include:

1. Eliminating the either/or position, adopting a “both/and” stance, and choosing lines of research most fitting for particular interests.
2. Providing a constructive place to work out discourse issues that foster a strong spirit of collegiality between the two fields of study and practice wherein students do not sense they are sleeping with the enemy.
3. Potentially attracting more students to our graduate programs. Because of the need for creative, innovative programs with integrity, it increases morale among students in AE and HRD, so they do not feel they are anomalies or marginalized.

4. Permeating boundaries for students, crossing boundaries and learning from each other.
5. Creating a community of inquiry and opportunities for reflective practice.
6. Providing the opportunity to work on cutting edge issues that have potential to address social justice, workplace democracy, ethics, and integrity.

Finally, from the point of view of both AE and HRD, practitioners learning about and being influenced by critical theory have the potential to shape how they impact organizations, communities, and societies. Critical theory would:

1. Better prepare individual practitioners to be professional leaders, capable of effectively dealing with the complexity of practice.
2. Allow the adoption of a both/and stance toward the problem of disciplinarity, enabling them to participate in whatever best fits their interest and thinking.
3. Provides an outlet to introduce them to an understanding of new lines of interest.

Critical theory would particularly empower practitioners to effectively act within the organizations where they work to:

1. Create radical communities of inquiry. As learning becomes more commodified and controlled by management and other elite entities within and outside organizations as a vehicle toward productivity it seems reasonable that shifting from conflict to connection affords practitioners the opportunity to define collaborative emancipatory agendas for learning and new knowledge creation that benefits individuals and society as well as the organization.
2. Ask critical questions, such as: What might notions of *emancipatory* and *radical* actually look like when linked with individual, career, and organizational development? As a practice, critical HRD is difficult to envision fully without dissolving into utopian prescriptions. However, sufficient concrete examples of critical workplace practice exist, as reported in the fields of CMS, labor education and critical workplace education, to suggest a viable way forward. Four approaches have been previously discussed: (a) emancipatory action learning, (b) emancipatory projects, (c) critical workplace education, and (d) HRD reflexivity (Fenwick, 2005).

Constructing the Bridge: Issues, Directions, and Conclusions

What issues, topics or forces may influence AE and HRD now and in the future? To what extent might these issues affect our ability to bridge the divide between the disciplines? Disciplines do not remain stationary and survive; they must change. In an effort to shed light on these questions and to better understand the dynamics of change, we must be aware of the forces that influence AE and HRD.

Much has been written about social and organizational changes that are having an influence on AE and HRD, including globalization, technology, development, economics, changing population and workforce demographics, consumerism, downsizing and off-shoring, corporatization, changing definitions of community, poverty, political upheavals, ethnic and religious conflicts, and war, just to name a few. To address how these forces alone or in combination are shaping the disciplines is a complex process, and beyond the scope of this

paper. But to illustrate how pervasive and subtly these forces are, we offer an example of how economics and corporatization are influencing the two disciplines.

The recent commodification of higher education and vocational training has forced AE and HRD to respond. Many scholars of AE (Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley, 2004) have noted how its discipline is changing and evolving, particularly with regards to HRD. Foley (2004), for example, surmises that the field of AE has been “largely displaced by specialist fields – vocational education, human resource development, community-based education and so on – the list is long and growing” (p. vii). Finger and Asun (2001) further argue that:

Adult education is, indeed, burgeoning. Never before has there been so much talk about 'learning' – and not only about learning by children, but learning by all members of society, organizational units, business, and even society as a whole. This is not to say that it has never happened before, but now such learning – which hitherto has been informal – is being measured, quantified, certified, recognized, and actively promoted. At the same time, learning is being customised, adapted to the needs of individuals and organizations, computerized, marketed, and sold worldwide like any other commodity. (p. 1)

How such forces may help or hamper our ability to develop critical theory as a bridge between the disciplines remains unknown. However, it seems reasonable to assume that concepts that question the *status quo* and seek liberation of those oppressed may face fierce opposition. So that we might avoid an untenable task in the face of ubiquitous capitalism, it is important for us to remain keenly aware of the external forces that in many ways shape our disciplines and seek to minimize negative and maximize positive influences (Fenwick, 2005). To ensure that critical theory and critical theory within HRD does not become simply another marginalized concept, we must quickly move away from conceptual discussions towards action.

The shared histories of AE and HRD offer not only origins and explanations but also patterns of development that point toward possibilities under this new umbrella of critical theory. Thus, what does the future hold for the field(s) with critical theory, and how would it function within AE and HRD without being marginalized or at least viewed as a second-class theory as it has been in management? The following are offered as points of discussion to help move critical theory toward a valid, respected, and utilized approach:

1. Link critical traditions more closely with empirical lines of research – We need data driven research using critical theories and related concepts.
2. Align critical theory with other major issues of importance that are emerging around the globe (i.e., ethics, corporate social responsibility, human rights, and critical management studies).
3. Support the professionalization of the fields to the extent that it fosters workplace democracy (Hatcher, 2002, 2004, 2006) and the emergence of critical theory (Collins, 1991).

Summary and Conclusions to Parts One and Two

A lack of harmony exists between the disciplinary conceptual foundations of AE and HRD. In the two articles, we argue that this tension results in a lack of understanding and focusing on the few differences and not on the many mutually beneficial similarities that would result in cooperation among AE and HRD scholars, practitioners, and students. As a response we

believe critical theory serves as a possible bridge to span the rift that exists between AE and HRD. Numerous reasons have been presented, and the theories and conceptual frameworks that have traditionally kept the two disciplines at odds with one another discussed. We offered several potentialities through critical theory if the two disciplines choose to coalesce, forming a bridge of collaboration, and the consequences if they remain disconnected. We further described the benefits of AE and HRD bridging the divide to the programs, faculty, students, and practitioners.

Although somewhat risky, we disagree with Marcuse (1964), who stated that professions tend to become atomic units, which require coordination and management from above. We are hopeful that careful reflection on matters surrounding critical theory as a bridge between the professions allows us to remain at least somewhat independent of bureaucratic management from above or other controlling devices that may subvert the autonomy of AE and HRD. Focusing more on theories that offer emancipation and freedom from tyranny and less on overt controlling mechanisms has potential to enhance the status and power of both disciplines.

“Some might argue that emancipatory educative practice within capitalist institutions is completely untenable” (Fenwick, 2005, p. 231) or that resulting changes such as the recent emergence of critical HRD becomes an empty promise to hopeful scholars and the oppressed in the workplace. It may also create a chasm between those espousing critical theory and those espousing performativity and profit motives as outcomes for HRD. If critical theory is viewed as an either/or with other more ‘mainstream’ theories such as economics or learning, then this would likely neither benefit either discipline nor enhance worker well-being or help marginalized and repressed peoples.

A bridge for AE and HRD provides a space where critical approaches to research and practice can be grounded, what Habermas (1984) called the “public sphere” (p. 18), where institutes resist established order and withstand capitalism. Thus, the prospect of critical HRD (i.e., critical theory) to become “empty ideas about ideas” (Fenwick, 2005, p. 231) may be averted.

Instead of accommodating the *status quo*, critical theory requires free rational thinking individuals to, as Marcuse (1964) has been credited with stating, set out to “organize reality in a critical manner” (p. 66). It also requires parrhesia, that fearless speech which Plato said was the “cause of my [his] unpopularity” (West, 2004, p. 16). But to what extent are our disciplines ready, willing, and able to enter into this parrhesia? Are we ready to uncover, examine, and face up to racists roots, susceptibility to greed and power, and other imperial tendencies?

Becoming a discipline that embraces critical theory requires a certain amount of disciplinary soul-searching and understanding of ethical boundaries. Thus, critical theory has the potential to expand AE and HRD’s ethical accountability and social responsibility (Hatcher, 2006). Additionally, critical theory may provide a way for AE and HRD to re-position themselves as disciplines that use critique to foster individual freedoms, workplace democracy, and work that is ethical and meaningful while simultaneously adding value to organizations.

The beauty of the bridge between AE and HRD utilizing critical theory is that scholars and practitioners have a central space or umbrella to engage in critique and work through their ideas with colleagues where “adult educators might find fruitful alliances with their HRD colleagues” (Fenwick, 2004, p. 194) and vice versa. Adult educators who are concerned about the field in terms of education for societal aims (supporting the status quo or changing the status quo), and human resource developers interested in critical approaches toward just and equitable workplaces would mutually benefit from this exchange. Oppositional voices to this union across disciplines may argue that by establishing such a shared space for critical dialogue and practice only marginalizes emancipatory issues and concerns in both disciplines. We are hopeful that just the opposite would occur. hooks (1990) reminds us that it is within the margins that significant oppositional space is created:

. . . marginality [is] much more than a site of deprivation. . . it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance. It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in works but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of a marginality which one wants to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving to center – but rather a site one stays in. . . It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds. (p. 149)

The nascent yet promising critical theory bridge between AE and HRD, even if developed in marginal spaces, serves as a catalyst for the development of a stronger sphere of influence in both fields. Moreover, by theorists and practitioners bridging interest and expertise, best practices can be shared and a greater influence and visibility of issues in both fields can be garnered. Thus, the current negative energies of AE and HRD scholars’ intent on sustaining detachment between our disciplines may be diverted towards collectively creating and sustaining a space to “nurture critical questions about power, interests, and equity and to articulate critical challenges of oppressive structures...” (Fenwick, 2004, p. 193) within varied contexts in which both disciplines engage and find solid common ground.

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