Introduction

In my previous paper, I wrote that I was primarily humanistic but somewhat conflicted in terms of a reference point to my orientation to adult education. I haven't radically altered my perspective and feel stronger in my affinity with the role of the adult learner as being responsible or in charge of their own learning; in other words, having autonomy in what and how they learn. This is not to say that I believe that a learner doesn't require the support from either another learner, group, or facilitator. As Leach (2005) sums up self-directed learning, 'we learn for ourselves' but not necessarily by ourselves. This integration of self within society is a theme that I will explore in this paper. I will also review the role of experience and reflection from both sides of the adult education theory continuum (individual and social), citing the work of educational theorists and writers such as Brookfield (1993); Cranton (2013); Leach (2005); Wenger (1999); and others, to support my position.

A Tradition of Polarity

Learner autonomy in self-directed learning has been at the heart of adult education for many years but not because it is clear and easy to understand but because of the compelling ambiguity that arises from it (Hiemstra, 1994; Leach, 2005). This is in part due to the way we conceive of self and the meaning of autonomy, our views about the underlying theory of social development, and the value we place on adult education. Is the purpose of adult education for personal growth or empowerment? Self-actualization or social transformation? To combat personal meaninglessness or oppression? Is knowledge constructed alone or together? I would agree that the adult education theory continuum or debate may pit individualism or personal focus on the one side, and on the other, social learning or self in society, but the values and beliefs that traverse these two positions can shift and morph, and

the argument seems less binary and polarizing to me than it does as equally true. As stated in the introduction, I am drawn to the humanist tradition in adult learning but I am also at times conflicted with its ambiguous categorization of the self and purpose. Are these two views really incompatible? As learners, are we not inherently connected with others but also inherently separate?

A Tale of Two Views and Finding Common Ground

As Cranton (2013) explains, the humanist tradition in adult education values the individual, the potential for development, their capacity or agency to change oneself. The roots of this thinking, contend Reischmann (2005) and Nesbit, Leach & Foley (2004), were based on Knowles' concept of andragogy and learner autonomy which in turn was driven out of 'optimistic socio-historic thoughts of a post-war United States' and also in reaction to cognitive and behaviorist approaches to adult learning theories. Maslow and Rogers furthered the application of humanistic psychology to adult education (Nesbit et al., 2004) by encouraging the shift of the locus of power from the teacher to the individual learner and brought the spotlight on the role of experience in the learner's life as being a key source of knowledge. Within this time period, Houle, Tough, and Knowles, pioneered the concept of self-directed learning which has also come to be associated with a basis in humanist psychology, and along with experiential learning, both have been widely critiqued for making too much of the individual and embracing subjectivity in favor of the social and contextual nature of learning (Brookfield, 1993; Hiemstra, 1994; Leach, 2005; Pearson, 1999; Zepke & Leach, 2002).

The other side of the continuum is 'social pedagogy' which is represented by educational theorists such as Vygotsky and Wenger and a prevailing theory of situated cognition which

shifts the focus from the individual to the sociocultural setting and where learning takes place as participation in communities of practice (Driscoll, 2005). Wenger (1999) maintains that at any given time we can belong to several groups or communities of practice (for example, at work, home, or school), and that the learning found in 'membership' of these communities of practice, can be the most personally transformative because it is rooted in everyday situations that are both informal and familiar.

Situated learning theory, through the concept of legitimate peripheral participation, focuses on identity - who we are as learners in relation to the group. Wenger (1999) acknowledges the inseparable duality of the social and the individual in his social theory of learning where individuals bring to a community their personal history of practice or norms that may complement or conflict with one another. One of the challenges of learning in communities of practice, therefore, has to do with the dynamics of power where both novice and expert are learning together; will the novice readily share their true self and beginners' perspective with the community or choose not to join? Consider as well participation in multiple communities, each with different 'practices'; does knowledge or learning happen in the same way for every individual? With these examples, it is clear that what constitutes a practice may not be the same for everyone nor is the level of participation in the community equal. Community does not always consist of a homogenous group of individuals, and motivation, participation, and behaviors, can differ and cannot always be managed by following the norms of the community.

Social learning theory posits that the goal of learning is not just personal growth and self-actualization but to also further meaning both individually, collectively in the community and more broadly in society. Subjectivity is not something to be stamped out in Wenger's social

theory of learning but rather is to be understood and mutually defined in the community or group, and is similar to Vygotsky's notions about social negotiation of meaning where learners test their own understanding against those of others in the community (Driscoll, 2005). Learning in groups is not an unfamiliar learning strategy for humanist learning theorists. Imel (1999) traces the roots of group learning back to Lindeman who saw the group as a primary method for 'connecting experience and social action' (p. 55). In this respect, humanist and social learning theories and practices share a common thread where adult learners are recognized as needing to use their experience to construct meaning for themselves, but they should also have the opportunity to construct it in association with others to create learning that is 'contextualized' in their socio-cultural milieu (Zepke & Leach, 2002).

Critical pedagogy also pays homage to social interaction in learning, yet critical pedagogues are more vocal in finding issue with the humanist tradition for failing to address social change and justice as a product of adult education (Brookfield, 1993, Cranton, 2013, Nesbit et al., 2004.). As a practice, emancipatory learning in some ways bridges the gap between critical theory and the humanist tradition of learning where personal growth and change is not just for the individual but can also be for the benefit of others.

Reflection, the act and art of becoming aware and questioning the assumptions that govern our thinking, can swing in both directions of the adult education theory continuum. Mezirow's transformative learning theory aims to synthesize both the humanist focus on the individual with the sociological view of critical theory, by studying the individual process of transformation while also acknowledging the effects of society. It accomplishes this through the practices of self-reflection and critical reflection, by having us reformulate our meaning

in life as we become aware of our subjectivity, thus linking 'subjective conditions of knowledge' with 'hidden aspects of social knowledge' (Cranton, 2013).

A Truer Sense of Self on the Continuum

To this point, I have outlined a tale of two views of adult education. One is the humanist tradition which views learning as a process of personal discovery and where the responsibility for learning is placed on the learner who is at the center of the experience. The other tradition is focused on social citizenship where experience is interactive and shaped by cultural influences that require us to be aware and recognize that societal and individual emancipation is interdependent. I have aligned myself on the adult education theory continuum as being primarily humanistic but have also expressed that knowledge construction, learning and meaning making, cannot help but both be personal and social.

In reference to feeling 'conflicted'; I would further declare that I am not entirely immune to a more social and radical tradition of viewing learning as dialogue, through oneself and others; however, that conversation might be more subtle and quiet than ones that Hall (2006) or Jenlink & Jenlink (2012) champion as 'engaged social citizenship.' I understand that learning through activism, changing the world we live in, has political and democratic dimensions (Hall, 2006) but it is a place on the continuum where I do not feel at home. Brookfield (1993) does accurately capture for me political overtones of why individualism - autonomy - is so important to hold onto, as a form of redistribution of power or freedom where one can control one's "own environments and destinies rather than have these framed by external authorities" (p. 231). However, this aspect doesn't capture the moral and existential notion of an evolving self where learning throughout life is about 'being and

becoming who we are' (Jarvis, 2008). It is with Pearson (1999), when appraising critics of Maslow's self-actualization theory who often portray the self as linear and rational and affirming that there is ambiguity in the humanist view where progress and regress is possible, that I feel a glimmer of belonging. And finally, when Pearson (1999) asserts that there is 'no grand entrance, no grand exit' as to placement on the adult education continuum, that I finally feel more at ease.

Conclusion

In this assignment, I have outlined that individual or psychologically-oriented learning theories such as transformative learning are also relational and contextual. I have also provided evidence that socially-oriented theories such as communities of practice acknowledge the individual and its relations with others. Zepke and Leach (2002) refer to this inherent multiplicity of ideas within adult education as a 'mosaic,' they all borrow freely from each other to better situate the role of the individual-social interaction in adult education. Adult education is after all flexible - to a point.

The theoretical and practical path the educator takes in response to whether one wants to develop learner autonomy or learner citizenship is very much rooted in one's context - definitions, outlook or worldview - and as Fenwick (2001) concludes, it is the path that has the 'greatest integrity, defensibility and efficacy.' Finally, Jarvis (2008) offers that adult education is about 'responsibility for the other without seeking to exercise power over the other.' In other words, emphasize the individual within the totality.

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