

## Chapter 21

# A Critical Review of Reflectivity, Andragogy, and Confucianism

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### ABSTRACT

*The link between Confucian humanism, Mezirow's theory of reflectivity, and the convergence of a worldwide concept of andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) articulated by Savicevic, Knowles, Mezirow, Henschke, and Cooper is explicit. While Confucian humanism emphasizes inner experience, Mezirow's theory has increasingly developed to integrate inner reflection expressed through transformed perspectives and decision and action, and andragogy has focused on facilitation of collaborative interaction and self-direction in learning involving the whole person. To appreciate the basis of these three schools of theory, this chapter presents a discussion of these originating theorists. As an introductory thought, the following quotations illustrate how Confucius' thought has long been valued and aspired to in the pursuit of reflection and wisdom. Rather than the routine or inattentive action that tends to dominate our lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this widespread 2000 year-old Eastern philosophy and tradition has been synonymous with questioning the meanings and assumptions of one's surroundings and values. In addition to advancing our understanding of transformative learning, andragogy, and an integrated model of reflective thought, the authors hope this chapter will stir further international research in reflective learning and the intersections of Eastern philosophies with Western traditions and philosophies, as well as those that bridge both traditions. Worldwide, there are many rich traditions; if our understanding of teaching and learning can build upon our understanding of one another, we can open new doors for appreciation, insight, interaction, and inquiry.*

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*Study without thought is labor lost; thought without study is perilous. By nature men are nearly alike, but through experience they grow wide apart. Those who are born wise are the highest type of men; those who become wise through learning come next; those who are dull-witted and yet strive to learn come after that. Those who are dull-witted and yet make no effort to learn are the lowest type of men (as cited in Chai & Chai, 1965, pp. 44-45). Confucius or Kong Fuzi (551-479 BC)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since Mezirow (1978) proposed his theory of transformative learning, which he based on his interpretation of Habermasian critical theory, interest in the theory has grown. Concurrently, Mezirow (1981) sought to coalesce his own ideas into a critical theory of adult learning and education which included self-directed learning and a charter for andragogy, although this fact is generally overlooked in discussion of transformative learning (or, theory of reflectivity as it is known in Europe). Over the years many articles, books (Cranton, 1994; King, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997; Mezirow, 2000), journals and even conferences, e.g., The International Transformative Learning Conference, 1998-2012, have examined, critiqued, and further developed this theory. This research has emerged within the field of adult education and provided a framework to support further detailed analysis of andragogy and to demonstrate how this theory has affected the development of adult learning thought (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

Notwithstanding the context of transformational learning, Mezirow (1981) expanded his adult learning and education perspective to include ten core concepts, which he called a charter for andragogy. Thus, the educator could enhance adult learners' capability to function as self-directed learners in the following ways:

- Decrease learner dependency.
- Help learners use learning resources.
- Help learners define his/her learning needs.
- Help learners take responsibility for learning.
- Organize learning that is relevant.
- Foster learner decision-making and choices.
- Encourage learner judgment and integration.
- Facilitate problem-posing and problem-solving.
- Provide a supportive learning climate.
- Emphasize experiential methods.

In his dissertation research, Suanmali (1981), a doctoral student of Mezirow, reported concurrence with these ten core concepts on the part of 174 adult educators, including professors and practitioners. However, in the years that followed Suanmali's (1981) research some concern has arisen over the belief that discussion of transformative learning has been too strongly focused on a rational perspective (Dirkx, 1997), a western perspective (King, 2005), and too narrowly within the formal field of adult education alone (King, 2004). Indeed, the discussion in Canada of transformative learning (O'Sullivan, 1999; O'Sullivan, Morrell & O'Connor, 2002) and in Europe (Jarvis, 1987) has often had a different focus than that of the discussion in the U.S. In Europe, adult theorists introduced Mezirow's work as "the theory of reflectivity" (Jarvis, 1987) as this was the focal point of the work; distinguishing it in its early years from the contemporaries of the behaviorists.

We present this article and model by which the similarities and differences among Mezirow's (1978) original theory of transformative learning; the worldwide history, philosophy and major themes in andragogy (Henschke, 2009, 2010, 2011a & 2011b; Henschke and Cooper, 2007; Savicevic, 2008; Knowles, 1990,); and the long-standing philosophy of Confucius can be considered. The need for such a model arises from a

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