

Towards a More Critical Cognizant Learning Model

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ABSTRACT

It could be argued that the current adult education paradigm aligns with a liberal knowledge economy. A more critical perspective is Paulo Freire's banking education concept that removes criticality from a learner's repertoire and facilitates alignment with the prevalent liberal education and its hegemonic objectives. Drawing from Paulo Freire's (1990) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Flores (2017) suggested that banking education teaches the oppressed to accept the oppressor's social framework. In this paper, and through the analysis of news media articles and policy documents, the author examines the phenomenon of terrorism and how a Western worldview constructs and engages in meaning-making for the reader. As a result, the author proposes a more critical cognizant adult learning model. Drawing from Habermasian theory, the need to cultivate humanity, and criticality as practiced by Critical Discourse Analysis, the author proposes a learning model construct of evolving criticality, emancipatory in intent, complex in its components and their relationships, with the intent of giving back agency to citizens.

KEYWORDS

Adult Education, Habermasian Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Paulo Freire, Terrorism

On a visit to Beirut, during the 2006 Lebanon war, the then-U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice described the plight of Lebanon as a part of the "birth pangs of a new Middle East" and said Israel should ignore calls for a ceasefire. At the time of her statement on July 22, 2006, more than 300 Lebanese civilians had been killed in 11 days of Israeli air and artillery strikes, mainly against the "terrorists" and their areas of popular support in Lebanon. Who was a terrorist and who was not a terrorist, and why? Why would the United States want a new Middle East? The discourse employed by both sides was confusing. Each side left out information. The label "terrorists" expanded throughout the Arab and Islamic Middle East and even affected Europe and the United States on September 11, 2001.

In 2011, the conflict in Syria started. The conflict in Syria and Iraq had attracted "something in the order of 25,000 to 30,000 [fighters with] 4,000-5,000 from the West" (Dawson et al., 2016, p. 3). In 2014, at least 130-145 individuals who had connections to Canada were suspected of terrorism-related activities, with 30-40 Canadians thought to be actively fighting in Syria or Iraq (Dawson et al., 2016). Numbers were estimated to have risen since 2014. The Canadian government was concerned that if its citizens were in war zones overseas, what might happen should the radicalized individuals return to Canada, along with the implications for Canada's international relations (Dawson et al., 2016). "For many, in other words, radicalization, like terrorism, is in the eye of the beholder: one man's radical (or terrorist) is another man's freedom fighter [so that] its meaning will always be contested" (Neumann, 2013, p. 878).

DOI: 10.4018/IJAET.347377

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Different definitions of terrorism exist. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives” (National Institute of Justice, 2017, Terrorism section, para. 3). The U.S. Department of State defines terrorism in Title 22 of the United States Code, Section 2656f(d): “[as] premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (National Institute of Justice, 2017, Terrorism section, para. 2). According to the Government of Canada in subsection 83.01(1) of the Criminal Code and cited in Building Resilience Against Terrorism (2013):

The definition of terrorist activity includes an act or omission undertaken, inside or outside Canada, for a political, religious, or ideological purpose that is intended to intimidate the public concerning its security, including its economic security, or to compel a person, government, or organization (whether inside or outside Canada) from doing or refraining from doing any act, and that intentionally causes one of several specified forms of serious harm (p. 6).

A critical context is provided by sociocultural critical theorists (Tariq Ali, Edward Said, Talal Asad, Noam Chomsky, Paulo Freire, Jürgen Habermas, Michel Foucault, Fazlur Rahman, Ali Sharī‘atī) in their views on the Islamic Arab world, the West, and the broader global Islamic world or ummah. The critical perspective occurs at a macro holistic level. “Critical,” as used in this paper means to explore how language is used to maintain power structures in society and how the less powerful, without realizing it, cooperate to maintain inequality. In other words, it explains how the oppressors use language to oppress the less powerful and, as a result, legitimize ideology and organized power.

The role of adult educators is to point out all aspects of the learned material. The effect of media and commercial power needs to be neutralized to give agency back to citizens. Edward Said described the effect of the power of the media as “the usurpation of the public space” (Said & Viswanathan, 2001, p. 205), so a rebalance is necessary. As a discipline, adult education is perhaps best positioned to facilitate the rebalance. Adult education has an interest in all areas of the discursive moment’s six elements in an issue at hand: (a) discourse/language, (b) power, (c) social relations, (d) material practices, (e) institutions/rituals, and (f) beliefs/values/desires. The discourse facilitated by the educator challenges the commodification of that moment with the resultant dialogue fitting into a discursive space that is critically challenged between learner and educator. At the macro level, Habermasian theory suggests that the lifeworld is constantly subjugated to mediatized colonization by the economy and the state, in particular, money and market, power, and bureaucracy (Pusey, 1987). Adult education, with an emancipatory intent, could manage to facilitate the discursive space situated at the interface between Habermas’s society as a system and society as a lifeworld. A challenge in academics is noted by Klaehn et al. (2022). The authors suggested that in the current employment paradigm, “specialization is valorized, and ‘fit’ can trump merit, not joining in with the flock, or not demonstrating allegiance with neoliberal norms that align with dominant configurations of power, at the macro and often micro levels simultaneously, can significantly impact perception, reception” (Klaehn et al., 2022, p. 348).

An academic’s life chances in terms of employment, mobility, opportunities, publications, prestige, status, and socioeconomic position are guided in the interest of concentrated power. Ideological levees that channel intellectual labor towards interests of concentrated power need to be broken down. A more critical cognizant learning model used as a framework could be used to facilitate the discursive space and break down some ideological levees.

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