Overview of several contemporary perspectives on adult learning

- Assumptions underlying a power relations perspective on adult learning draw from a wide range of literature such as:
  - Marxist and feminist theory
  - Critical race theory
  - Multiculturalism
  - Critical theory
  - Postmodernism.

- Your text chose three interlocking themes to set the stage for a discussion of contributions to adult learning from critical theory, postmodernism, and feminist theory/pedagogy.
A Critical Assessment

- Is the heart of all of these orientations that lead to systems of power and oppression:
  - the forces of economics
  - class
  - race
  - gender

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All consider how knowledge is constructed and how the nature of its construction can liberate or dominate.

Critical Theory

- Critical theory’s strength lies in its critique of existing economic and social structures and resultant power dynamics.

- However, "it is a discourse that often leaves practitioners frustrated" in suggesting workable strategies for effecting change.
Critical Theory -- Several aspects of critical theory were discussed:

- Habermas's three distinct types of knowledge and the conditions necessary for ideal discourse
- How to make institutions sites for learning
- The relationship between systemic forces based on money and power and the everyday lifeworld of adults.

Habermas's three distinct types of knowledge

- Technical
- Practical
- Emancipatory

Some believe that adult educators are too concerned with the technical (how to plan programs or arrange a classroom) at the expense of considering why some adults do not have access to education.

Habermas' Conditions Necessary for Ideal Discourse

- Comprehensibility
  - Having complete information
- Sincerity
  - Being free from self-deception
- Truth
  - Speaking the truth
- Legitimacy
How to Make Sites for Learning

- Habermas believes that while all institutions are educative, not all are true learning communities.
- An institution, whether family, corporation, or state agency, may be organized to block free and non-coerced learning processes.

Habermas encourages us to ask whether our institutions, large and small, truly enable human beings to unfold their potentials (cognitive, oral, technical, aesthetic) in their daily routine interactions.

Critical adult educators have a "mandate... to argue and struggle for workplaces that open up space for non-coerced, free communication pertaining to the organization, control and purposes of work."

Systemic forces and the lifeworld of adults.

- Another contribution of critical theory to adult education is the notion of the interplay between the lifeworld and the system.
  - The lifeworld is the informal, everyday interactions of daily life
  - The system consists of those structures based on money and power (corporations, government, education, and so on) that have an impact on the lifeworld.
These systems do more than intrude into the lifeworld; they oppress.

- Collins (1991, 1995a) writes about how forces from the system, such as expertise, competency-based curricula, and much of workplace learning, have disempowered adults in their lifeworlds.
- He writes, “For a critical perspective on adult education the initial task is to identify social structures and practices which (mis)shape social learning processes and undermine capacities adults already possess to control their own education.”

Seven "learning tasks" embedded in critical learning theory:

- Challenging ideology. “The basic tool for helping adults learn to penetrate the givens of everyday reality to reveal the inequity and oppression that lurk beneath.”
- Contesting hegemony. Hegemony is the notion that “people learn to accept as natural and in their own best interest an unjust social order.”
- Unmasking power. “Part of becoming adult is learning to recognize the play of power in our lives and ways it is used and abused.”

- Overcoming alienation. “The removal of alienation allows for the possibility of freedom, for the unmanipulated exercise of one’s creative powers. As such, claiming freedom and overcoming alienation are inextricably intertwined.”
- Learning liberation. Adults need to learn to liberate themselves, individually and collectively, from the dominant ideology.
- Reclaiming reason. “A major concern of critical theory is to reclaim reason as something to be applied in all spheres of life, particularly in deciding values by which we should live, not just in areas where technical decisions are called for.”
- Practicing democracy. Adults must learn to live with the contradictions of democracy, “learning to accept that democracy is always a partially functioning ideal.”
Postmodernism

- Uncertainty characterizes today's postmodern world.
- Giroux (1992, p. 39) observes:
  - "We have entered an age that is marked by a crisis of power, patriarchy, authority, identity, and ethics.
  - This new age has been described, for better or worse, by many theorists in a variety of disciplines as the age of postmodernism."

Postmodernism

- Postmodernism challenges the certainty and rationality that characterize modernity.
- Uncertainty, diversity, and multiplicity can be fragmenting and disempowering for some, energizing and powerful for others.
- It's major contribution to adult education has been to bring to the foreground previously oppressed and marginalized groups.

In a postmodern world, everything is "contested," up for grabs.

- What has been or is considered true, real, or right can be questioned; there are multiple interpretations depending on where one is standing and what factors are in juxtaposition with one another.
- There are no absolutes, no single theoretical framework for examining social and political issues.
- Hence, critical theory's goal of emancipation and overcoming oppression can itself be questioned because it represents a "logic" that "does not tolerate difference"
Collins points out, postmodernism leaves us with no means of choosing “sensibly between one course of action and another.

There is no truth to be found, only a plurality of signs, styles, interpretations, and meaningless process.”

Therefore, it leaves us with two opposed views.

- It can be seen as “offering a pessimistic, negative, gloomy assessment... of fragmentation, disintegration, malaise, meaninglessness” (Rosenau, 1992).
- Or it can be seen as hopeful — a world that is “nondogmatic, tentative, and nonideological”, one in which adult education can play a major role.

Postmodernism comes up lacking on specific techniques or strategies for dealing with the postmodern classroom or adult education program.

Postmodernism does offer adult education a respect for diversity, a moving of previously marginalized groups into a position of equal value to other groups, and a critique of the categories by which we have labeled aspects of our practice.

Feminist Pedagogy

- It focuses on the concerns of women in the teaching-learning transaction.

Feminist pedagogy is derived from feminist theory, or more accurately, feminist theories

- Such as liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, Black, Marxist, and postmodern versions of feminist theory.

Feminist pedagogy is “a method of teaching and learning employing a political framework that involves consciousness-raising, activism, and a caring and safe environment.”
Feminist Pedagogy

- Just as there are many feminisms, there are also numerous strands of feminist pedagogy that have been categorized in various ways.
- Maher (1987) has placed the various perspectives into one of two categories:
  - Liberatory models
  - Gender models.

Liberatory Models

Draw from postmodernism and Marxist and critical theory.

From this perspective, the structures of society, the systems that intrude on our lifeworlds, oppress through their power and control.

The structured nature of power relations and interlocking systems of oppression based on gender, race, and class are seen as being reinforced through education; that is, institutions of learning and the classroom itself reproduce the power structures found in society at large.

Liberatory pedagogy examines how these systems of oppression are reproduced and resisted in education.

Gender Model of Feminist Pedagogy

The focus is on how female identity has been socially constructed to be one of nurturer and how the individual woman can find her voice, becoming emancipated in the personal psychological sense.

Drawing from psychoanalytic and humanistic psychology, educators from this stance look to how the educational environment and the learning transaction can be constructed so as to foster women’s learning.

A connected approach to learning is advocated, where life experiences are valued, where a woman can come to have a voice, and hence, an identity.
Forging a Synthesis of the Liberatory and Gender Models

- Tisdale promotes both personal emancipation and public action.
- She first identifies four recurring themes in feminist pedagogy:
  - how knowledge is constructed
  - the development of voice
  - the authority of the teacher and students
  - dealing with differences

Tisdell's poststructural feminist pedagogy model

- Implications for the teaching and learning transaction.
- It speaks to differences among learners themselves: “Most women and some men may have different learning needs from men who represent the dominant culture”
- There is attention given to the role of power in the construction of knowledge itself-power’s role in how knowledge is shaped and disseminated in the classroom, and in society at large.

- A poststructural pedagogy examines how "various positionalities -- the gender, race, class, sexual orientation-- of both the participants and the instructor matter and have an effect on the learning environment"
- Finally, this perspective problematizes the power and authority of the teacher and considers the ramifications of redistributing this power.
Assignment

- Read about Traditional Learning Theories
  Chapter 11
- Do the Annotation
- Start Learning Activity 8
  - Note that it is due on November 19th

Also Remember

Daylight savings Time ends on November 4

Fall Back . . . Set your clock back one hour if you want to be on time on Monday, Nov 5th.