



BROOKFIELD AND MEZIROW ON CRITICAL REFLECTION: EMPOWERING ONESELF, TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

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Abstract:

The goal of (critical)ⁱⁱ adult education is to emancipate people, to make them reflect, realize what oppresses them and take transformative action towards a more just and democratic world. In practice, it leads to the acquisition of knowledge / skills, and it is often commodified by awarding certificates / degrees adapting to the demands of the labor market. Mezirow's transformative theory has influenced the field, educators, and researchers as well. Critical reflection constitutes a necessary condition for transformative learning, a term often found in adult and higher education and considered a critical aspect of personal, educational, and professional development. This paper aspires to explain the shift of adult education to the labor market by employing Foucault's theory and to compare the way two scholars, Mezirow and Brookfield, perceive the concepts of critical reflection and transformation and the prospects they accordingly appoint to the processes in relation to an emancipatory adult education. We conclude that Mezirow's perspective focuses more on the individual, pursues self-realization and progressive change of society. For Brookfield, education goes hand in hand with politics. His view is critical/radical and aims at profound and drastic social change where collective action is essential.

Keywords: critical reflection, transformation, critical theory, ideology critique, hegemony

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ⁱⁱ We put the term *critical* in parenthesis because we want to emphasize that criticality should be inherent in adult education- and any education for that matter - making the modifier *critical* redundant.

1. Introduction

Adult education has historically originated (from the end of 19th century and up until the mid-80's) from social movements connected to emancipation (Gioti, 2019; Heany, 1992; Kokkos, 2006). One could thus support, that criticality was once an inherent element of adult education, which used to have a radical prospect as it arose within the critical paradigm. In theory, the goals of (critical) adult education are to empower, transform, and emancipate people by making them reflect on their oppression, understand its nature, illuminate power relations and inequalities within society, and take transformative action towards a just and democratic world (Apple & Au, 2009; Brookfield, 2000a, 2005, 2017; Freire, 1977, 2006; Zarifis, 2009).

Adult education has indeed addressed and still addresses issues such as adult literacy, youth unemployment, feminist movements, migration, civic education. However, a general trend has emerged in Europe since 2000 which connects adult education to economy and employment (Gioti, 2019). A trend that strips adult education of its criticality and makes it market-oriented, a commodity that awards degrees/certificates and adapts to the demands of the labor market (Briton & Plumb, 1993; Fejes & Salling, 2016; Finnegan, 2008). Adult education now aims more at professional training, acquisition of skills and it mostly concerns people who have already attained a university degree and wish to update their knowledge and skills so as to achieve better salaries, promotions, career shifts, and generally improve their life through better economic conditions, always however adapting to the world around them. (Vergidis, 2004; Grollios, 1999 as cited in Gioti, 2019, p. 240). Vocationalism has become the driving force of adult education policies and programs (Fejes, Wärvik, & Runesdotter, 2016) and a common trend in Europe (Keogh, 2009).

In this paper, we will comment briefly on the market orientation of adult education, and we will compare two major scholars' theories and work on critical reflection and transformative learning. We chose to compare Mezirow and Brookfield since the former is the one who developed and elaborated the Transformative Theory that deeply influenced the field of adult education and the latter, building on the work of Mezirow, has presented seminal work on critical reflection and an approach of great theoretical and practical value.

1.1 Adult education in the service of dominant ideologies?

How can we read the shift and adaptation of adult education to the labor market? Foucault's views on power offer an explanation. Foucault supports that power is ubiquitous and suggests that we should perceive of it not as a single structure but as a nexus of power relations that is rooted in and penetrates every inch of the social system (Bevir, 1999; Keramas, 2014). He also rejects the static nature of power as a universal antithesis between two "fixed" subjects (Gallagher, 2008; Keramas, 2014) and argues that power has changed forms and mechanisms throughout time eras, and social and economic developments so as to continue to be efficient and effective. Accordingly, he

distinguishes between different forms of power such as sovereign power, disciplinary power, and biopower (Bevir, 1999; Keramas, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2015; Widder, 2004). The first (sovereign), concerns the obedience to the law of a central authority figure (e.g., king, monarch, president) who exercises power from above. Sovereign power was present during the Middle Ages feudal system and up until the passage to industrial society (17th - 18th century) (Keramas, 2014, Kioupkiolis, 2015). Parallel to the dawn of capitalism disciplinary power emerged in order to address and regulate the new concept of individuality (Widder, 2004). Disciplinary power monitors individuals by defining their relationship with time, by segmenting space, creating mechanisms of hierarchical form and collecting and classifying information about the lives and conduct of the individual. This is why Foucault supports that modern power relations are productive rather than negating. They lack the use of physical force and violence but make the subject produce its own confinement (Fraser, 1981; Keramas, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2015). Disciplinary power is power that is exercised by people on themselves as a form of self-surveillance. Another form of power according to Foucault is biopower having as its primary function the control and management of populations through techniques such as pastoral power a manifestation of which is the welfare state (Bevir, 1999; Genel, 2006; Keramas, 2014; Kioupkiolis, 2015). Foucault claims that the state's power is both an individualizing and a totalizing form of power, *"a tricky combination of individualization techniques and of totalization procedures"* (Foucault, 1982).

With the collapse of the welfare state biopower had to change its function and found itself in new mechanisms. It is *"organized to lull people into submission to the dominant order through organs of ideological manipulation"* (Brookfield, 2005, p. 120), adult education is one of them. The adaptation of adult education to the market allows agents of power to control and lead adults into educational paths that serve the labor market, presenting a new way to reproduce the productive subject, an essential element of capitalism. Knowledge is something to be had and teachers wind up dispensers of knowledge (Fromm, 1976 p. 37 in Brookfield, 2005 p. 167). As a consequence, adult education rather than challenging existing systems, posing important questions, and fighting for equality and justice, focuses on how to make these systems work better, a manifestation of Marcuse's one-dimensional thought (Marcuse, 2002).

So, how can we challenge existing systems, and change problematic beliefs and habits? Can the analysis of Foucault offer a way? While we certainly do not negate the great importance of Foucault's work and its contribution to the critical approach of adult education (Gioti, 2019), we hold the opinion that his perspective leads to a dead-end as far as the potential for resistance is concerned (Sangren, 1995; Kerr, 1999; Borg, 2015). His discourses concerning power cannot explain what produces power (Heller, 1996; Metafas, 2010; Keramas, 2014). Poulantzas (2008 in Keramas, 2014, p.21; Sangren, 1995) argued that for Foucault, power has no other basis than itself, power is always immanent. If every controlling/dominating situation, he wondered, is self-existent, then why should there be any resistance? How is resistance even possible and where would it come from? Foucault prefers a theory that dissolves and disseminates power in numerous micro-

situations, understates the importance of social stratification, and ignores the pivotal role of the State (Keramas, 2014; Metafas, 2010). Foucault ignores the macro-level of the exercise of power and his analyses take on a more descriptive rather than explanatory or causal character (Keramas, 2014; Jessop, 2004). In this way, he overlooks the fact that the oppressed are not “naturally” oppressed but oppressed by structures, ideologies, and hegemonies forced upon them by powerful minorities whose purpose is to preserve the status quo. He denies them the chance to understand their oppression, take a position towards it, and try to change it, not underestimating that their actions of resistance are limited and suppressed by the very structures they are trying to transform (Borg, 2015; Kerr, 1999). Thus, although we believe that Foucault’s theory explains adult education’s shift to the market, we also support that it cannot constitute a pocket of resistance against powerful structures and hegemonic ideologies that shape and guide our world.

1.2 Education for Transformation

A theory that has deeply influenced the field of adult education, educators, and scholars is Mezirow’s transformative learning theory. Transformative learning refers to the process (perspective transformation), through which problematic frames of reference—assumptions, beliefs, and expectations are reviewed, challenged, and transformed to become more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, and emotionally able to change (Mezirow 1990, 2000; Zarifis, 2009). Our belief systems and consequently the way we define and construe reality, make judgments, and act are formed by dominant ideologies, context (social, economic, political), and our experiences (Gioti 2010, 2019). An integral element of transformative learning is the process of critical reflection (Brookfield, 1985; Mezirow, 1990, 1997, 2003; Zarifis, 2009) -a term we often meet in adult and higher education, in universities and institutions’ mission statements (Tsui, 2003), a term considered a vital aspect of personal, educational, professional development (Lundgren & Poell, 2016), and a prerequisite for empowerment and emancipation.

Transformation and critical reflection are two processes that many scholars have attended to and that have the potential to lead to a more inclusive, just, and democratic world. Brookfield and Mezirow are two scholars with extensive work on the subject. We chose to compare the specific scholars because Mezirow is the one who developed and elaborated the theory of Transformative Learning that goes hand in hand with critical reflection. Brookfield, influenced by Mezirow, developed a comprehensive model that helps educators engage in the critically reflective process. His model, according to our opinion, is one of the few that offers a tangible, thorough, and concrete way to approach the process of critical reflection. Moreover, our choice was guided by the culture we live in and by the language barriers we face. Our western culture and the fact that we can only access literature in the Greek and English language play a role in the choices we make.

The way these two scholars approach these two processes differs because of their different theoretical and ideological backgrounds and perceptions. We begin with

Mezirow, since he is the one who developed the theory of Transformative Learning within which he placed the process of critical reflection.

2. Mezirow

2.1 Influences and definition of critical reflection

Mezirow is influenced by critical theory (mostly Habermas), Freire, pragmatism (Dewey), constructivism, and cognitive psychology. Critical reflection according to Mezirow refers to challenging the validity of presuppositions in prior learning, to addressing - in other words - the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are raised or specified to begin with (Mezirow, 1990). He supports that critical reflection can be “*either implicit such as when we mindlessly choose between good and evil because of our assimilated values*” (Mezirow, 1998 p. 186), or explicit when we knowingly and consciously question and assess the reasons that led to a specific choice. However, when the object of critical reflection is an assumption, he differentiates between critical reflection of assumptions (CRA) or objective reframing and critical self-reflection on assumptions (CSRA) or subjective reframing (id). Critical reflection of assumptions consists of narrative CRA and action CRA. Narrative CRA examines the validity of concepts, actions, and feelings communicated to a person through speech, writings, art and action. CRA examines one’s own assumptions when defining a problem so as to act more effectively towards its solution. In other words, we could say that critical reflection of assumptions pertains to instrumental learning, to performance improvement, to solving a problem. Critical self-reflection on assumptions (CSRA) on the other hand underlines critical analysis of the psychological or cultural assumptions that lead to an individual’s psychological constraints and to the fundamental circumstances that form one’s experiences and beliefs (id). It involves a critique of a premise upon which the learner has defined a problem, and its aim is to effect major perspective transformations.

Mezirow (1998) differentiates between different categories of critical self-reflection on assumptions (subjective reframing). He mentions:

- Narrative CSRA: critically examining the validity of our own ideas, beliefs, and actions through a narrative into our own lived experience.
- Systemic CSRA: reflect on the principles, paradigms, ideologies (economic, educational, political, religious, bureaucratic) that created roles and relationships and, on the way, these have molded and constrained the development of our point of view, our attitudes, our actions.
- Organizational CSRA: identifying assumptions that are embedded in the history and culture of a workplace and how they influence us.
- Moral-ethical CRSA: examination of the principles guiding one’s ethical decision-making.
- Therapeutic CRSA: creates cognizance and critical knowledge of assumptions guiding one’s feelings, dispositions, and action consequences. This kind of problem-posing and problem-solving is central to psychotherapy.

- Epistemic CRSA: examines assumptions and explore one's frame of reference (shaped by biographical, historical, cultural context), its nature and consequences, to determine why they are inclined to learn in specific ways or set goals.

Mezirow, influenced by Habermas' communicative learning, describes a learning process that is rational, analytic, and cognitive with reason as an inherent characteristic. Transformative theory supports that human learning is grounded in the nature of human communication and that to understand the meaning of what is being communicated one should engage in critical reflection of assumptions and critical self-reflection on assumptions which constitute "*the emancipatory dimensions of adult learning, the function of thought and language that frees the learner from frames of reference, paradigms or cultural canon that limit or distort communication and understanding*" (Mezirow, 1998 pp.191-192). Mezirow distinguishes between instrumental and communicative learning (Mezirow, 1981, 1985, 1996, 1997). The first focuses on procedures or methods in the context of problem-solving. In the latter, critical discourse (optimal circumstances for participation in a consensual assessment of an idea in doubt) validates meaning. The three core elements of transformative learning are rational analysis, critical thinking on one's own premises and experience and the process of critical reflection which is developed mainly through critical dialectical discourse (Mezirow, 2003). Transformative learning can take place in both areas of learning (instrumental and communicative) (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow's theory has existed since its emergence not as a fixed object but as a dynamic piece of work (Mezirow, 2009). Mezirow received criticism about the downgrading of action and about the fact that he disregarded influences like power, ideology, class, race in his work (ibid). However, Mezirow converses with his critics and elaborates, processes, and modifies his theory supporting that cultures do influence who learns what as well as the when, the where, and the how of learning. He views transformative learning as "*a metacognitive epistemology of evidential (instrumental) and dialogical (communicative) reasoning*" and as "*an adult dimension of reason assessment involving the validation and reformulation of meaning structures*" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 93).

As far as transformative action is concerned Mezirow (1992, 1998) is of the opinion that making a decision constitutes an action and that after critical reflection one may decide not to change their behavior or change may be delayed due to several reasons (specific situation makes action impossible, lack of information, mental and emotional state of an individual) (Gioti, 2019).

Mezirow concentrates on the communicative aspect of critical reflection and his view of transformation focuses on the individual. The self plays a central role in transformative theory and discourse and reflective dialogue aims at self-efficiency, self-development, self-regulation, and empowerment. The ultimate goal of adult education for Mezirow is to help adults realize their potential, and become more emancipated, socially responsible, and independent learners. (Mezirow, 1981, 1997). He underlines the psychological and individual aspects of transformation and personal growth although he supports that adult education can also aim at social goals and social action (Mezirow, 1991). However, he clearly states that "*education is the handmaiden of learning, not of politics*'

equating personal transformations to social processes that leave room for social action" (ibid, p. 118).

Let us now turn to Brookfield to examine how he perceives critical reflection and its role in transformative learning.

3. Brookfield

3.1 Influences and definition of critical reflection

As Brookfield himself states several traditions have influenced the way he approaches and defines critical reflection and transformation. The most prominent is the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (and its theorists Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, Fromm). He was also influenced by Mezirow, Freire, Foucault, pragmatist constructivism, analytic philosophy and logic, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy (Brookfield, 2000b, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2016, 2018). Pragmatist constructivism concerns the way we construct and deconstruct our knowledge and sees reflection as the analysis of experience, the seeking of new information, new understandings, and perspectives (Brookfield, 2005, 2016, 2018). Critical reflection in this context leads us to revise our assumptions, experiment, and cast doubt on any form of dogmatism. Analytic philosophy views reflective practice as the process of thinking better by identifying logical fallacies, thinking creatively, and making good decisions (ibid). Psychoanalysis and psychotherapy focus on the identification and revisiting of inhibitions acquired during childhood (ibid). Mezirow's theory influenced Brookfield who also connected transformation with his own nuanced approach to critical reflection. Freire's influence is also evident in the way Brookfield approaches critical reflection and transformation as they both appoint a radical/critical and emancipatory prospect to the field of adult education and they both view education and teaching as political processes since they are framed and directed by dominant ideologies and their manifestations (governments, institutions, social structures).

Brookfield defines critical reflection as the intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of teaching assumptions that inform our practice. Critical reflection focuses on three mutually linked processes: 1) the process by which adults challenge and substitute untested accepted assumptions 2) the process through which adults adopt alternative perspectives and 3) the process by which adults recognize the hegemonic aspects of dominant ideologies and realize they benefit a small minority (Brookfield, 1995). Brookfield differentiates between three types of assumptions (Brookfield, 2017):

- Paradigmatic,
- Prescriptive,
- Causal.

Paradigmatic assumptions are those that we use to arrange the world into basic categories. We do not recognize them as such, but we consider them as accurate depictions of reality. An example of a paradigmatic assumption is that the students who

are vocal in a classroom are those interested in a topic and another one is that democracy ensures justice. Prescriptive assumptions refer to what we think should be happening in a given situation and we use the word *should* to express them. A prescriptive assumption building on the previous example is that teachers should promote participation in the classroom. Finally, causal assumptions concern the way parts of the world work and are usually expressed in predictive terms. An example of a causal assumption is that class participation will offer students the opportunity to better understand the topic at hand. The easiest assumptions to uncover are prescriptive while paradigmatic are the most difficult to identify and critically examine and it takes a great effort and amount of negotiation to change (Brookfield, 2017).

So how does Brookfield grasp the concept of critical in critical reflection? His understanding draws mostly from critical theory which along with its contemporary educational applications such as critical pedagogy aims to fight oppression, injustice, bigotry, and lead to emancipation. Critical theory is a social theory born within the Frankfurt School that aims to critique and change society as a whole by making people uncover the underlying assumptions that create an unjust and oppressive world. Critical pedagogy, a term first used by Henry Giroux in 1983, constitutes a broad, multifaceted, and interdisciplinary current of thought and practice that focuses on examining power relations and knowledge policies and their implications on the fields of education and culture. Several theoretical traditions, approaches, and key concepts compose the common point of reference for understanding critical pedagogy. These are: the Marxist tradition, critical theory, critical consciousness, social construction of knowledge, power-knowledge relationship, hidden curriculum, and social reproduction (Gioti, 2022, 2019, 2010; Giroux, 2011; Kincheloe, 2008; McLaren, 2002; Welton, 1995).

The notion of critical and the task of critical reflection as perceived by Brookfield is twofold (Brookfield, 2000a, 2000b, 2010, 2016, 2017):

- 1) To illuminate and analyze power and power dynamics which in agreement with Foucault's view permeates all aspects of life and is linked to the notions of empowerment and emancipation.

In order to accomplish this, adults need to engage in ideology critique which is to analyze and examine assumptions that are considered as natural and reasonable ways to make sense of the world. These assumptions are borne of dominant ideologies such as capitalism, positivism, democracy, militarism, patriarchy, white supremacy, which have been imposed from above as a control mechanism and are designed to keep the system and all its inequalities and oppressions untouched. People must learn to recognize the way these uncritically accepted dominant ideologies have been assimilated in everyday situations and practices and have "*become universalized as the ideas of all*".

- 2) To expose hegemony.

Hegemony is a term developed by Gramsci (Brookfield 2010, 2016, 2017, 2018; Leonard & McLaren, 2002) one of the founders of the Italian communist party. According to him, hegemony is an educational relationship through which people learn to embrace beliefs and attitudes that work against them. In other words, it is the process through

which concepts, arrangements, and actions that serve a small minority in power are considered by the majority as natural, fated, and working for their own good when in fact they keep an unjust and oppressive system intact (id). That's where organic intellectuals help people achieve critical consciousness and participate in political struggle. Gramsci like Freire (Freire, 1977, 2006) supports that intellectuals work either on behalf of the oppressor by reproducing dominant ideologies and sustaining the status quo (dominant intellectuals) or on behalf of the oppressed and coming from within them (organic intellectuals in the service of the underprivileged) by helping masses achieve critical consciousness, realize the hegemonic self-imposed limitations and act politically to change them. (Brookfield, 2005, 2016). As Herman and Chomsky (1988 in Brookfield, 2005, p.43) very eloquently put it, hegemony's function is to "manufacture consent", learning from below, a manifestation of Foucault's disciplinary power through which we exercise power on ourselves and by ourselves, we learn to surveil ourselves and become skillful in self-censorship. Brookfield supports the same by calling hegemony "*the conspiracy of the normal*" (Brookfield, 2017, p.17) and claiming that "*the dark irony of hegemony... teachers become willing prisoners who lock their own cell doors behind them*". Brookfield argues that all interactions in adult education are framed by power, a view consistent with Freire (1977) who supports that no (educational) action is neutral and Foucault who was the scholar who expanded the influence of power to fields that were previously considered as non-political (Keramas, 2014).

3.2 Critical reflection and transformation in educational contexts

Brookfield proposes four lenses that teachers can use to become critically reflective (Brookfield, 1998, 2002, 2010, 2017): students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experience, and theory. He argues that by employing all these sources one can obtain a thorough understanding of their teaching and of the power relations that infiltrate and influence what is happening in the classroom. Brookfield agrees with Freire that education is never neutral and has either an emancipatory or an oppressive and preservative nature. He also argues that critical reflection is or should be a collaborative endeavor because it constitutes a demanding task that could lead to what he calls *cultural suicide* and *political marginalization* (Brookfield, 1994, 2017). He also stresses the importance of the fact that critical reflection is an intentional process and not something that happens by accident or unconsciously. Moreover, he argues that critical reflection even on the most personal issues or unknown areas is culturally dependent, as our actions, language, and feelings are framed by the context - social, historical, political, and economic (Brookfield, 2000a).

Brookfield's perception of critical reflection in the context of transformative learning, apart from perspective transformation, is inextricably linked to collective action towards drastic social change and emancipation (Brookfield, 2000a, 2016, 2017). If action is absent, critical reflection ends up just liberal navel-gazing. He asks for our caution so that transformation does not end up entailing just experimenting, solving a problem or practical issues within the teaching process. Transformation is about acquiring

fundamentally different ways of perceiving reality and everything in it - always from the point of view of power, ideologies, and hegemony - and acting collectively in order to change society, reduce and eliminate inequalities, and make the world a more democratic and just place for the oppressed. It is a never-ending project, political at heart, tiring at times, demoralizing at others so allies are essential (Brookfield, 2017).

4. Comparing Brookfield and Mezirow

Brookfield and Mezirow share theoretical influences (Pragmatism, Psychology, Critical Theory) but Freire's work played a catalytic role in the shaping of their educational philosophy and their theoretical and methodological approach to critical reflection and transformative learning. However, despite their common influences and the fact that Freire had a political stance towards and understanding of education, the two scholars approach transformation and critical reflection differently and appoint different goals, prospects, and ideological tones to their approaches.

Their main difference is that Mezirow (2007) emphasizes the individual cultural contexts within which critical reflection on assumptions and potentially transformative learning take place. He supports that the pursuit of transformation as far as the political context is concerned can contribute to people becoming more critical and taking decisions that can empower a democratic regime and promote a more inclusive and open democracy. His political philosophy is consistent with Dewey's philosophy and the tradition of progressivism and in its most radical versions with the movement of reconstructionism where political changes were placed within the existing sociopolitical system, which was believed to be open to change and renewal (Gioti, 2010). Brookfield on the other hand claims that dominant ideologies and power relations define the overarching context that penetrates the individual cultural contexts and appoints to transformative learning the prospect of overturning inequalities and asymmetrical power relations and privileges. This according to him, is attainable within a socialist sociopolitical prospect.

Therefore, we can see that Brookfield who was influenced more by critical theorists Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse but also by Freire and Foucault views the analysis of power, the uncovering of hegemony and ideology critique as part and parcel of critical reflection and transformative learning (Gioti, 2019). He -like Freire before him (Shor, 2002)- views education and teaching as a political process and educators as political actors who strive for the empowerment and liberation of people. Dominant ideologies (capitalism, patriarchy, positivism, white supremacy) inhabit the air we breathe (Brookfield, 2017) and affect all aspects of our lives and social structures and institutions. To say that education and teaching remain unaffected by them is unrealistic. Mezirow was influenced by critical theory (but mostly by Habermas) and pragmatism (mostly Dewey), and these influences are evident in the fact that he focused more on the communicative and discursive aspect of critical reflection, on establishing the optimal conditions for communication, on discourse where use of power is discouraged while

participation, pluralism, and self-development are encouraged. Power, ideologies, wealth are distortions that prevent unhampered communication. By overcoming these distortions and through constant communication people preserve and recreate social life. Moreover, Mezirow (1991, p.118) claims that education is the handmaiden of learning, not of politics' when in fact education and schooling serve as instruments of class domination (Cannoy & Levin 1985, as cited in Collins, 2009, p.36), reproduce education inequalities (Vesely, 2012; Batruch, Autin, Butera, 2019), "*provide the perfect 'breeding grounds' for the reproduction and inculcation of the dominant (neoliberal) ideology*" (Macris, 2011, p. 25), and constitute one of the main areas of government intervention (De la Croix, Doepke, 2009). What we mean is that since educational systems are products of governments and political decisions it is inevitable that they carry the characteristics of their creators' ideologies. How can we even claim that education does not serve politics since it is the state that arranges the economic and social factors (funding, facilities, staffing, employee benefits, teaching resources) that make up the educational system? And although in theory educational systems should promote equality, critical thinking, democracy, active citizenship and participation, ecological justice (UNESCO, 2021), they still have not managed to avoid functioning as agents of social reproduction.

Moving to more specific differences between the two scholars we see that Brookfield supports that critical reflection on assumptions is the only form of critical reflection and underlines the presence of intention throughout the process. Mezirow on the other hand argues that critical reflection can also be implicit and distinguishes between different categories of critical reflection, running the risk according to Brookfield of separating the inseparable. Mezirow's systemic critical self-reflection is closer to Brookfield's perception because it involves reflection on the ideologies, norms, paradigms that have shaped, framed, and constrained our perspectives and stances. Every category that Mezirow considers distinct in relation to systemic critical self-reflection involves some form of ideology critique according to Brookfield (2000a).

Another divergence concerns the prospect of critical reflection. For Brookfield critical reflection and transformation have an emancipatory/activistic prospect that requires collective action, critical analysis, and challenging of power and status quo. Mezirow's transformative learning focuses on the individual and the reconstruction of the notion of the self (Inglis, 1997), and power is examined only to the degree it prevents the true realization of the self. Inglis (id) supports that transformative learning is learning for empowerment which revolves around helping individuals gain/accomplish more economic, political, and social power. So, empowerment pertains to people acquiring and developing skills and capabilities that will help them act within and adapt to existing conditions and power structures while emancipation has to do with examining, and challenging power, and existing political, economic structures. The focus on self-improvement moves critical reflection away from power analysis and transformation away from the collective and the social and towards the individual. Empowerment emulates Foucault's disciplinary power whereby people learn to monitor themselves, follow the rules, and adapt to their environment in order to gain some form of capital

(social, economic, political, or cultural) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119 in Inglis, 1997 p.11) and feel more powerful or worthy.

From all the above it is understood that Brookfield's approach is critical/radical aiming at drastic social change through collective action while Mezirow's is progressive seeing change more as an adaptation within existing structures and not so much as a struggle against inequalities, oppression, and hegemony. However, there is a social trend within Mezirow's theory that focuses on empowerment that transforms social conditions through action towards a more open, fair, and democratic society (Gioti, 2019; Toka & Gioti, 2021). Nevertheless, it lacks the prospect for revolutionary and profound change that underpins Brookfield's radical approach.

As far as Mezirow's view on power is concerned we can express the same criticism we did for Foucault. By dividing critical reflection into categories and focusing on personal change and transformation he remains within the micro-level of exercise of power and fails to make a clear connection between the personal-topical and the societal-general. Brookfield on the other hand, just like Foucault, sees power everywhere in our lives and, unlike Foucault, acknowledges the macro-level of exercise of power, linking what is happening to every one of us to the structures, ideologies, and hegemonies that operate and are imposed from above. It is through the realization of this connection and through collective transformation and action that we will be able to free ourselves. As units, we are unfortunately disposable. It is in unity that we have a chance.

Several basic principles, concepts, and approaches of critical pedagogy are evident in both scholars' conceptions. They are both influenced by critical theory although towards different directions and goals. They both support that knowledge is socially constructed and suggest that a dialectic relationship between teacher and learner is essential for critical reflection to develop and transformation learning to happen in adult education programs. Nevertheless, apart from Mezirow's systemic critical self-reflection on assumptions, the issue of power (relations) and criticality as conceived by critical theorists Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse is mostly prominent in Brookfield's approach. Brookfield argues that social justice is inextricably linked to teaching and learning and that power relations construct regimes of truth that are embedded in our speech, our ways of knowing and understanding. He believes that educational institutions can be either places of manipulation or places of emancipation and in agreement with Freire teachers can either liberate or sustain the oppression. Moreover, critical pedagogy professes that through social reproduction, educational institutions perpetuate and reproduce the social relationships and attitudes that ensure that the dominant social and economic order remains intact. Brookfield agrees and supports that power and dominant ideologies penetrate not only educational institutions but every area of our life – family, media, work, relationships –trying to maintain the status quo, keep hegemony hidden, and make people consent to their own imprisonment.

5. Concluding remarks

The difference that pervades the views of the two scholars is that Brookfield sees politics as part and parcel of education, whereas Mezirow considers education as the handmaiden of learning. Mezirow downplays the significance of the political context and claims that the way one learns to think about themselves is something different from and unaffected by the political context. He supports that we should not confuse the context with the process in transformative learning and that thinking clearly in order to reach better, and informed decisions is the aim of critical reflection in any context. Brookfield supports that since education mirrors its creators' ideologies, educators should work towards unmasking inequalities and hegemonies and towards acting collectively in order to strive for a more inclusive and democratic world. Mezirow underlines personal transformation and in his approach, collective action is optional depending on the circumstances. As a whole Brookfield's position in relation to critical reflection is simultaneously narrower and broader than Mezirow's. Narrower because his interpretation of critical reflection has power and hegemony as its focal point and broader because this interpretation pervades every aspect of life and human action. It's like a light that passes through a narrow crack on one side of a wall and is then dispersed on the other side illuminating everything.

Power dynamics and hegemony define, influence, and control our interactions, our actions, our relationships, our families, our work, the media, and consequently our societies, economies, cultures, politics. It is our belief that no one can escape from their influence because they are part of the air we breathe. Critical reflection is truly critical when it challenges power and hegemony, when it aims at emancipation, when it tries to give voice to the silenced and free the (self-) imprisoned, when it strives for drastic societal transformation and eradication of the elements of market economy in fields like education at the least. Adult education should first and foremost strive for critical awareness and collective action alongside its other purposes (skills development, vocational training, recreation, self-development). History has shown that only in unity have things changed for the better. Adult education should not be domesticated or subdued. Putting the modifier *critical* next to adult education, signifies that adult education has lost its once inherent criticality. We should put critical back into adult education and let other modifiers signify its differentiation from the norm.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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