

# Liberating Online Adult Teaching and Learning from the Lens of Marx and Others

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Teaching and learning involve the teacher-student contradiction. Further, it is within the contradictions of capitalism that we are engaged in resolving the teacher-student contradiction. However, as much as teachers wish to help students learn, they may unintentionally conform to the ideologies of the ruling class. Likewise, learners are willingly to learn according to the pedagogies imposed upon them. The authors of this article argue that we may use the critical theory advanced by Marx, Habermas, Freire, Mezirow and Brookfield to replace the ideologies of the ruling class with our own, hence liberating teaching and learning. In the virtual environment, we can do the same. We must practice critical theory by examining our own teaching through research.

Keywords: Capitalism, Contradiction, Ideologies, Critical Theory, Andragogical, Pedagogical, Web 2.0 Technologies, Virtual Classroom, Habermas, Karl Marx

## INTRODUCTION

Rapid progress has been made in science and technology. When people invented the sewing machine, the locomotive, the power loom, the telegraph and built the railway system in the early nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was brought to the Western Hemisphere. Now when trains fly in France, Japan, and China at the astonishing speed of at least 350 kilometers per hour, the post-Industrial Revolution era has come. To be more accurate, as the Web 2.0 technologies have successfully connected the whole world economically, socially, politically and culturally in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are truly living in this information age or the third age in Alvin Toffler's terms (Toffler, 1970, 1980, 1990).

There is no question that the contradictions of society, the type of social and economic system, whether capitalist, socialist, or communist, can improve teaching and learning or stifle teaching and learning. Regardless, the speed of development of teaching and learning is not compatible with the rapid progress made in science and technology. This is tantamount to saying that teaching and learning have lagged far behind science and technology, and research in the area of teaching and learning lags even further. To some extent, teaching and learning cannot enhance the progress made in science and technology.

With government or agency funding, technology can be innovated overnight. However, changing people's ideology is much more difficult, no matter the funding! It would be even harder to change the social norms in a given society. Think about how long it took to take down the Berlin Wall. Think about how long it took for the former Soviet Union to turn to "democracy." Think about how long it took for the Chinese to turn to a market economy after years of political struggle such as launching the Cultural Revolution. Changing one's teaching and learning is just like changing one's cultural norms, one's dearly held ideologies. One's teaching and learning are clearly driven by one's philosophies, theories or accepted truths or conventional wisdom--and these are without a doubt one's ideologies.

This is why we cannot innovate one's teaching and learning overnight just like we do technology. Then we hear prominent educators such as Knowles and his associates (2005) claim, "the whole educational enterprise has been frozen into the pedagogical model." What Knowles was describing is that for centuries, teaching adults has been the same as teaching children. The same teaching methodologies used to teach children have been used to "teach" adults, despite the fact that the context in which adults acquire knowledge is drastically different from the context in which children learn. To make the picture rather bleak, in higher education settings, most educators conform to the same teaching strategies to teach learners without taking into consideration the special characteristics of adult learners, experiences of adult learners or the special learning styles of adult learners. Because of the harsh reality, scholars like Knowles devoted their whole life to "liberating adult teaching and learning." What Knowles did in the 1970s was that he made the distinction between the education of adults and the education of children. Indeed this distinction brought revolution to adult education and training. Prior to the 1970s, educators taught the way they were taught, maintaining the status quo. However, it is difficult for an educator to change his or her philosophy of teaching without experiencing a course in which andragogy or critical theory is practiced.

Once the distinction was made, at least adult educators began to practice teaching andragogically. Pedagogy had been people's ideology for centuries. This is what Knowles did to change educators' dearly held ideology, and he devoted his whole life to promoting such a change. He described the adult learning process as "an emerging technology for adult learning." In time, Knowles developed a seven-step process that encompassed andragogy and required educators to do the following:

1. Set a cooperative learning climate.
2. Create mechanisms for mutual planning.
3. Arrange for a diagnosis of learner needs and interests.
4. Enable the formation of learning objectives based on the diagnosed needs and interests.
5. Design sequential activities for achieving objectives.
6. Execute the design by selecting methods, materials, and resources.
7. Evaluate the quality of the learning experience while redesigning needs for further learning. (as cited in Carlson, 1989, pp. 5-6)

As we have observed, Knowles brought revolution only to adult education and training. Otherwise, he would not have said that the whole educational enterprise had been frozen into the pedagogical model. If we take a close look at the whole higher educational setting including the virtual classroom initiated by Web 2.0 technologies, it is obvious that educators still conform to the traditional teaching methods derived from the traditional learning methods.

In terms of teaching online, programmed instruction has been heavily relied upon. In other words, instructors prescribe learning objectives that learners need to attain. Instructors try to provide educational experiences that are most likely to help attain learners' learning objectives in the online learning environment. Instructors strive to effectively organize those educational experiences. Finally, instructors determine whether these learning objectives are being attained. This kind of teaching is the standardized pedagogical model used for centuries. It is the so-called teacher-directed education, merely presented online in a new environment. It is still top-down education. This is drastically different from the andragogical model Knowles advanced in the field of adult education and training. However, researchers and educators cannot stop with the andragogical model; we must continue to examine and adapt our practices for the ever changing learner. We must continue to study adult teaching and learning, especially in the new contexts of online environments.

Based on the above observations, teaching and learning have made progress very slowly. Andragogy was coined in 1833, and it was not until the 1970s that Knowles revolutionized adult education. The progress becomes even slower when we think about Socrates, Plato and Confucius when their disciples were of adults, not of children at the time. However, no andragogical methods were advanced prior to the 1970s. When adult educators try to address adult learners' development tasks and real life programs in adult education, they are indeed focusing on everyday and common developmental tasks and ordinary problems such as adult learners' need for a degree or credential in order to return to more productive employment. Little do they touch on much deeper problems in the workplace or life such as the contradictions of capitalism within which the majority are heavily "exploited" in Marx's terms (1929). Sandlin (2004, p. 31) called for adult education that should focus more on creating a "critical pedagogy of consumption" where learners examine their own habits and the societal framework that influenced them. Wilson and Kiely (2002, p. 6) go so far as to claim

Today much academic adult education remains thoroughly ensconced (and seemingly quite happily so) in the theoretical confines of 60s/70s' understanding of teaching the individual learner: humanist developmental psychology, andragogical learning theory, and professional practice . . . Without a practical theory of critical learning, the profession of adult education will become increasingly irrelevant to and ineffectual in addressing the increasingly complex demands of adult educators.

Although andragogy has successfully replaced with pedagogy, it has done so only in adult education. At this point, andragogy has only helped adult educators become more effective instructors. It has not made further implications as to how learners can learn to cope with deeper contradictions of capitalism characterized by hegemony, power, alienation, bigotry, racism, prejudice and exploitation. One of the most penetrating contemporary theorists, Stephen Brookfield, advocated that adult learners learn to challenge ideology and replace it with their own by relying on the power of critical theory. There is no doubt that Brookfield was heavily influenced by radical philosophers such as Marx (1929), Habermas (1971), Freire and others that belonged to Frankfurt School. However, he is so right in advocating that adult learning has to do not only with

ordinary developmental tasks or problems, but more importantly it has to do with deeper contradictions of capitalism.

[Critical theory] must understand adult education as a political process in which certain interests and agendas are always pursued at the expense of others, in which curriculum inevitably promotes some content as “better” than some other, and in which evaluation is an exercise of the power by some to judge the effort of others.(Brookfield, 2001, p. 21)

Only critical theory can challenge ideology and contest hegemony. We must embrace it in adult education and use it to improve not only our practice but our lives and those of our students. As instructors, we must be cautious that we are not promoting hegemony ourselves.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is critical theory? How do educators and learners use this theory to guide their practice? Critical thinking is the foundation of the critical theory as advanced by so many theorists such as Adorno (1973), Horkheimer (1974, 1995), Marcuse (1964) and Brookfield (2005).

Critical theory views ideologies as broadly accepted sets of values, beliefs, myths, explanations, and justifications that appear self-evidently true, empirically accurate, personally relevant, and morally desirable to a majority of the populace, but that actually work to maintain an unjust social and political order” (Brookfield, 2001, p. 14).

In adult education, teacher and scholars claim, “every conscious adult learner can learn.” What this means is every adult learner with normal IQ and Emotional Intelligence has the ability to disengage himself or herself from the tacit assumptions of discursive practices and power relations in order to exert more conscious control over their everyday lives (as cited in Brookfield, 2005, p. 12). This is truly the essence of critical thinking and critical theory.

In adulthood, mature learners are surrounded by not only developmental tasks, life problems, but also ideologies, hegemony, inequality, bigotry and alienation. That is why Rousseau observed, “Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.” After reading Brookfield’s book titled *The Power of Critical Theory: Liberating Adult Learning and Teaching*, one cannot help but conclude that we truly live in the contradictions of capitalism within which the majority of the people are heavily “exploited” in Marx’s terms (1929). Even the early Greeks believed that working people did not think and thinking people did not work (Kacirek, Beck, & Grover, 2010, p. 32). This corroborates the fact that the ruling class does belong to the God’s chosen few. Given the harsh reality, adult learners are naturally involved in ideology critique by using the power of critical theory. As noted by Brookfield (2005, p. 13),

As a learning process, ideology critique describes the ways in which people learn to recognize how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices. As an educational activity, ideology critique focuses on helping people come to an awareness of how capitalism shapes social relations and imposes—often without our knowledge—belief systems and assumptions (that is, ideologies) that justify and maintain economic and political inequality.

To Karl Marx (1929), the goal in ideology critique is to replace ruling ideologies with working-class, or proletarian ideologies, hence revolution from the grassroots. While the Soviet Lenin advocated replacing ruling ideologies with working class ideologies through violence, both Confucius and Mezirow advocated using either Confucian “silent

reflection” or Mezirow’s critical reflection to combat external ideologies such as communism, capitalism or fascism characterized by hegemony, alienation, bigotry, racism, inequality or corruption.

What Mezirow truly wants educators and learners to do is to become critically aware of how and why the structure of psych-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way people see themselves and their relationships (1981, p. 6). While Marx and Lenin wanted change of the ruling class’s ideologies through violence, Mezirow wanted both educators and learners’ perspective change through critical reflection. Perspective change would not be possible without ideology critique. The very definition of learning is different in critical theory, “Learning, then, is a process of challenging truth claims and arriving at a critical consciousness that these are not universal truths but claims that serve the interests of some at the expense of others” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 59). To address adult teaching and learning, if educators can change the way they teach and the way they learn via the power of critical theory, they are truly liberating adult teaching and learning. This liberation, or emancipatory learning, may require a reexamination of adult education through a more critical lens. Inspiring emancipator learning is not easy, and although many instructors of adults may claim it is as a goal, it is an ongoing process. Adult learners may not recognize the value of their experience or act upon their knowledge until months or even years after the course has ended.

Although the father of adult education, Malcolm Knowles replaced pedagogy with andragogy (the art and science of helping adult learn) in adult education and training only, has this revolution been applied to online teaching and learning in the 21st century? There is no question that both educators and learners still stick to traditional instructional and learning methods such as programmed instruction, four step instruction (motivation, presentation, homework, follow up or evaluation), reacting to instructional materials in the virtual classroom. Only when critical theory is applied, can online teaching and learning be liberated as well, helping learning achieve personal emancipation and liberation, and combat social, political, and economic oppression within society.

### **CHANGING THE WAY WE TEACH AND LEARN IN THE VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENT**

In this section, the authors of this article will outline briefly literature on the way we currently teach and learn, emphasizing these processes in the virtual environment. We will also integrate throughout our suggestions for modifying the current methods of teaching and learning and reflections following the model of critical theory.

Cramer and Wasiak (2006) addressed the power of asset-based thinking by advocating that we need to change (a) the way we see ourselves, (b) the way we see others, and (c) the way we see situation (p. 25). Translated into online teaching and learning, educators need to adopt the same mind set. Too often, we depend on conventional wisdom to conduct teaching and learning online. Because of this over reliance over traditional teaching and learning, our learners are ill-prepared in the three educational domains (cognitive, psychomotor and affective) to combat social ills such as hegemony, inequality, bigotry, alienation, bureaucracy, prejudice, and ruling class ideologies.

Numerous national reports have indicated that our students do not compare with students from other industrialized nations or from emerging new industrialized nations such as China and India. Legislative action has developed an accountability system for K-12 public schools with every student being tested every year. From *A Nation At Risk* in 1983 to *No Child Left Behind* in 2002, how much federal monies have been invested in honing our students’ learning skills in order to liberate themselves to become productive

citizens in the contradictions of our dearly held capitalism? While large sums of federal monies have been invested, our teaching and learning have rarely been innovated or changed. “Yet, the measures for most of these reports and laws are standardized testing, itself perhaps a prime example of hegemony (Kilgore, 2001, p. 55).”

The dominant message is that these tests are objective measures of one’s ability to learn. However, tests do not take into account students’ different experiences and opportunities to practice, or motivation. Yet new tests are validated by the fact that the same students who achieved high scores on prior tests also receive high scores on the new tests. High scorers continue to be favored throughout their engagement in formal education while low scorers are segregated and labeled as failure. (Kilgore, 2001, p. 55)

This distinction is evident not only in admission to higher education but even in admission to individual majors. For example, teacher education programs require standardized assessments for admission and licensure, as mandated by their state and accrediting bodies. One of the most popular of these licensure exams is the Praxis, created by ETS (ETS, 2010) and used by over 40 states. Thus, those who have succeeded on these types of assessments become the next generation of teachers.

As E-learning has become the norm in not only adult education, but also in K-12 education, so many universities refuse to deliver their programs via Web 2.0 technologies for fear that they would lose accreditation. “In the past, federal law required institutions of higher education to teach at least one-half their courses in a traditional classroom setting (as opposed to on-line)” (Beaver, 2009, p. 66). However, Congress has modified this law so institutions may now provide unlimited online courses.

The bottom line is our teaching and learning must be radically changed and then our students can become more competitive in the international arena. Recently Stanford Universities sent their students to compete with students from other countries to determine students’ IQ. The result was students from Shanghai Jiaotong University, China received the first place; students from University of Moscow, Russia received the second place and students from Stanford University ranked 14th among all other competitors from other countries. This true experience should make all educators and administrators question our education system. Where exactly has it been broken? How can we fix it? Again, innovative teaching and learning should be the key. In reality, too many educators still apply the banking concept of education to practice because that was the way they were taught.

According to Freire (Freire, 1970) in our oppressive society, banking concept of education is what the ruling class wants, and educators do everything they can to conform to this practice either intentionally or unintentionally. “The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). In the opinion of these authors, the reason most educators continue to use the banking model is because it is easier to simply tell learners what they need to know than to challenge them to determine for themselves what and how they should learn. It may be the only educational model the instructor or the learners have previously experienced. These educators are not utilizing critical theory, perhaps because they have no knowledge of it or perhaps they do not wish to disturb the status quo. Freire suggested a “problem-posing” approach to education rather than banking where “the teacher presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers her earlier considerations as students express their own” (Freire, 1970, p. 81).

Even in the workplace, those who seek advancement may find that using critical theory is not valued. “Inquiry into promotion practices in the interpersonal realm might

reveal that managers tend to promote those who are most like them” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 53), thus maintaining the status quo. Instructors may fear being questioned or may not be experienced in that type of learning environment. The banking model is safe and allows instructors to teach the same class over and over again with little revision or modification to adapt for the individual learners in the class.

In teaching and learning, the banking concept of education mirrors bone fide pedagogy, the art and science of teaching children. This contrasts with Merzirow’s (1981) critical reflection and is bound to produce docile learners who are incapable of creativity and innovation in learning. Freire (1970) agreed with this point, “[the banking concept of education] attempts to control thinking and action, leads women and men to adjust to the world, and inhibit their creative power” (p. 77). Let’s take a closer look at this banking concept of education and see where it came from and why it serves the interests of the ruling class:

- The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
- The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
- The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
- The teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
- The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
- The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
- The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
- The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
- The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
- The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (Freire, 1970, p. 73)

Clearly the banking concept of education represents the pedagogical model in education, and it is a set of beliefs or ideologies based on assumptions about teaching and learning that evolved between the seventh and twelfth centuries in the monastic and cathedral schools of Europe out of their experience in teaching basic skills to young boys (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). In the subsequent centuries and in this day and age, this pedagogical model has been entrenched firmly in our education system.

To many instructors, this represents the only way to teach learners or help learners learn. The banking concept of education regards men as adaptable and manageable beings (Freire, 1970). The learners’ mind is just like a blank sheet of slate in which instructors can write whatever they wish to write. In other words, instructors are heavily influenced by behaviorism, which mirrors the American education philosophy in the 20th century. “Cultural and social reproduction theorists believe that the ultimate purpose of education is to reproduce the social class structure” (Beaver, 2001, p. 54). When the banking model is employed, students, who may then become educators, merely begin the cycle again by using the banking model with their own students.

As Freire observed, the capability of banking education to minimize the students’ creative power and to stimulate their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world revealed nor to see it transformed (Freire, 1970). Would they care about Merzirow’s (1981) theory of transformative learning so that learners’ perspectives can be changed? To these oppressors, only docile learners would help them keep the mal-practice status quo. Those emancipated or liberated learners would try to replace the ruling class ideologies with their own. However, in the past we had Karl Marx, Lenin who really sought real change in learners. In this contemporary world, we

have educators/philosophers such as Knowles, Freire, Habermas (1971), Merzirow (1981) and Brookfield (2001) who really care about engaging learners in critical thinking and the quest for emancipation. It was these educators who brought refreshing teaching and learning philosophies to the education system. As noted by Freire (1970, 1973, 2003, as cited in King & Wang, 2007, p. 198),

But the humanist, revolutionary educator cannot wait for this possibility to materialize. From the outset, her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest of mutual humanization. Her efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them.

Based on progressive, humanistic and analytic philosophies, Knowles devoted his whole life to replacing the pedagogical model with his andragogical model. At least he was successful in doing so in the adult education field if not in the whole education system. In the introduction section, we talked about his seven step process. Below is a table that shows clearly how his andragogical model has replaced pedagogical model in adult education:

*Table 1: Replacing the Pedagogical Model with Knowles’s Andragogical Model in Adult Education*

<i>Elements</i>	<i>Pedagogy</i>	<i>Andragogy</i>
Role of teachers	Teacher-directed	Self-directed
Climate	Formal authority-oriented, competitive, judgmental	Informal, mutually respectful, consensual, collaborative, supportive
Planning	Primarily by leader	By participative decision making
Diagnosis of needs	Primarily by leader	By mutual assessment
Setting goals	Primarily by leader	By mutual negotiation
Designing a learning plan	Content units, course syllabus, logical sequence	Learning projects, learning content sequenced in terms of readiness
Learning activities	Transmittal techniques, Assigned readings	Inquiry projects, independent study, experiential techniques
Evaluation	Primarily by leader	By mutual assessment of self-collected evidence

(Adapted from Wang, 2009, p. 175).

As E-learning has become more and more popular in the 21st Century, more educational establishments have successfully replaced the pedagogical model with the andragogical model in terms of how to deliver their educational programs to learners. If it were not for the andragogical model, giant universities such as University of Phoenix, Capella University and Northcentral University would not be serving learners from around the world. It is these for-profit universities that were the pioneers in making learning truly “a mouse click away.” The courses offered by many of these universities are geared specifically for working adult learners. “In terms of convenience, on-line degrees represent the ultimate, since a credential can be obtained without leaving one’s home, making them appealing to working adults, while at the same time providing a cost

advantage” (Beaver, 2009, p. 65). Time needed for degree completion may be less because of a more condensed schedule of courses or course credit given for work experience, another strategy often used by for-profits to appeal to the adult learner. Online courses are just one reason these for-profit universities have become so popular. However, it is important to remember that these universities also exist in our capitalist economy. While traditional universities could learn from some of the progressive practices of for-profit universities, they must be cautious. Not all online learning is effective or critical.

Adult educators must continue to enhance their practice, both face to face and online, not to compete in the crowded marketplace of higher education but to fulfill their obligations to the learners. “In the past, federal law required institutions of higher education to teach at least one-half their courses in traditional classroom setting (as opposed to online) in order for their students to qualify for federal student aid” (Beaver, 2009, p. 66). However, that requirement has since been dropped. Teaching online does not mean compromising the quality of instruction, but it may mean students and even the instructors question the system where they are learning. The difficulty in using critical theory is that one may end up criticizing one’s own employer, lifestyle, or even society at large. These are not comfortable discussions. “Because capitalism will do its utmost to convince us that we should live in ways that support its workings, we cannot be fully adult unless we attempt to unearth and challenge the ideology that justifies this system” (Brookfield, 2001, p. 16).

Learners should engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization in the virtual environment as well as in a face to face class. After self-directed learning in the virtual environment, can the learners think, do, and feel differently? “Transformative learning, for example, with its emphasis upon critical reflection and perspective transformation, is not necessarily emancipator in nature if that transformation does not lead to some kind of action” (Imel, 1999, p. 4). This is true regardless of the form of instruction, whether face to face or online or a hybrid of the two. In an online environment, where most thought is expressed through writing, the critical reflection may be more evident to the instructor, as opposed to a face to face class where the primary vehicle for instruction may be discussion. Yet, instructors may feel more comfortable with the face to face discussion, where they can read body language and guide the topic, flow, and length of the discussion.

If the role of education is seen as a means of bringing about major social change, online educators must use the radical teaching philosophy to equip learners with knowledge, skills and attitudes to combat social, political, and economic oppression within society. The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe (Freire, 1970). Freire (1970) continued to argue that verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating “knowledge,” the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking. Humanistic or radical educators must distance themselves from the banking educational approaches described by Freire as these approaches clearly serve the interests of the ruling class.

While a few critical educators can guard against the ideologies from the minority, most people are not forced against their will to assimilate dominant ideology. They learn to do this, quite willingly, and in the process they believe that this ideology represents their best interests (Brookfield, 2005, p. 94). He further indicated that ideology in the form of hegemony works when people actively welcome and support beliefs and practices that are actually hurting them (p. 94). These words ring true in the classroom as

well. Adult learners may prefer the banking model as much as the instructors because it is what they have previously experienced in education. An instructor who expects all adult learners to be completely self-directed immediately will not be effective. The instructor must consider both the content and the context of the learning (Merriam, 2001). A variety of models exist for self-directed learning, and it is beyond the scope of this article to discuss them. However, the authors of this study believe the banking model and models of self-directed learning can also extend to technology usage. Instructors and students may resist new technologies that could enhance learning. The instructor should justify any use of technology and be flexible by allowing students to expand their own use of technology gradually. Instructors must recognize that the mere use of technology is not necessarily beneficial; technology can support the banking model just as easily. How can we change the mentality of these educators and learners who willingly adapt to the ruling class hegemony?

The best way is to turn to Mezirow's critical reflection and Brookfield's critical theory as the purpose in applying critical theory is to develop critical consciousness among the people in order to combat ruling-class hegemony and replace this with proletarian hegemony (Brookfield, 2005, p. 112). Has Brookfield become a Marxist? "Any adult educator interested in how adults learn critical consciousness needs to engage [Marx's] ideas. Many of the critical tradition's most important analytical categories—false consciousness, commodification, alienation, praxis, emancipation—are derived from Marx's interpretations" (Brookfield, 2001, p. 8). Brookfield believed that Americans especially steer away from even mentioning Marx because of the connotations his name carries.

However, history repeats itself. While Marx addressed the exploitation in the 19th century England factories; are we living in a better society in this day and age? The basic problems we are faced with are the same contradictions of capitalism characterized by hegemony, racism, inequality, alienation, organized corruption. Out of the harsh reality, scholars developed a brand new philosophy called postmodern philosophy as we live in this postmodern society. Kilgore (2001) contrasted critical and postmodern perspectives in the context of adult learning, emphasizing "the most significant contribution to our understanding of adult learning from either the critical or postmodern worldview is the recognition and theoretical inclusion of the diversity of learners we in adult education serve today" (p. 60).

To tackle the problems in this society, both educators and learners must question such fundamental concepts as truth, theory, reality, knowledge and power. We must cast doubt on many accepted truths and critique existing ideologies prescribed to us by the ruling-class. This is not easy and may lead to some uncomfortable moments as we challenge the preconceived notions of both our students and ourselves. While we, as adult educators, value the experiences of our students, we also must encourage them to evaluate and analyze using critical theory. This may require us to push our students beyond their comfort level (Zembylas, 2008), also often a requirement when teaching an online course. But we must also model for our students, pushing ourselves past our own comfort level.

Indeed, if we wish to change the way we view ourselves, the way we view others and the way we view the outside world, we must adopt and adapt contemporary critical theory advanced by giant scholars such as Marx, Habermas (1971), Knowles, Mezirow (1981), and Brookfield (2001, 2005). Otherwise, we would stick to the traditional pedagogical model forever. While the banking concept of education may have its place in education, it seeks to produce docile followers who label themselves as "team players" who continue to accept and memorize any ideologies promoted by the leaders. In the 21st Century, we need learners who can think, do, and feel differently. How can we attain this

goal? We must liberate the way we teach and the way learners learn by incorporating critical theory.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

Researchers and scholars are always interested in solving pedagogical problems so that teaching and learning can be more effective. The goal in teaching is for learners to seek change in three domains: cognitive domain, psychomotor domain and affective domain. If learners cannot think, do, or feel differently after taking a class, that means instruction has failed. That may also mean that learning has not occurred on the part of the learners. However, more philosophical questions need to be raised regarding teaching and learning. Should teaching and learning serve the interests of the God's chosen few? Or should teaching and learning be used to challenge the mal-practice status quo that has plagued our education system? While the whole educational enterprise has been frozen into the pedagogical model to serve the interests of the ruling class, what should researchers and scholars do to replace this prolonged model with innovative models such as andragogical model, critical theory and postmodern philosophy? Will researchers/scholars jeopardize their position if they research into issues revolving around the contradictions of capitalism within which most people are heavily exploited in Marxist terms? Is using critical reflection the only way to liberate learning?

Using critical theory, we should even reexamine our own beliefs about educating adults. By valuing the experience of adult learners, perhaps instructors are reinforcing the status quo rather than encouraging students to examine it critically. Even the widely held notion in adult education that the experience of the learner must be valued "privileges adult experience, setting this against that of young people as somehow more authentic" (Avis, 1995, p. 174). This may also be a challenge for online learning, where adult may have less experience. Avis, who also referenced Marx, also believed that some instructors may only use the experience of the learners to reinforce the banking model, to validate the instructors' curriculum and ideas. However, on the other end of the spectrum, instructors should take care not to discount the experiences of students, especially in a diverse classroom. There is after all, usually only one instructor with one perspective, and many students. These perspectives should be welcomed but also examined using critical theory. Instructors should model this by practicing critical theory themselves, perhaps through research.

For most university instructors, research is a part of the job description. Why not involve the learners in this research? Why not use the data generated from emails, discussion board posts, and other online interactions to evaluate the effectiveness of the online delivery? In his action research study, Michaelinos Zembylas (2008) examined the reactions of the adult learners in his online cultural diversity course. "This study highlights the importance of online learning as a safe medium of engaging in critical emotional reflexivity, because adult learners had numerous opportunities in terms of time and space to share their emotional struggles and reframe their beliefs" (p. 77). This research study is an example of the future research adult educators must do, enhancing both their own instruction and sharing their insights with others. In this way, research and teaching are not two separate entities, but one. An instructor who is willing to research his or her own practice is one who is practicing critical theory.

As some educators predict that the free exchange of information via Web 2.0 technologies will eventually bring democracy to the Chinese people, what are the educational implications of E-learning for learners in North America? Have universities invested enough money in Web 2.0 technologies to support their faculty and learners? Is their goal to keep the mal-practice status quo or to produce learners who are capable of

critical thinking and creative learning? While equipping oneself with critical theory is not tantamount to toppling the current establishments, at least it can help change the way we view ourselves, the way we view others, and the way we view the whole outside world, as well as hopefully the views of our students. After all, we do not want to be manipulated and controlled by others. Those are the issues that will continue to spark research and subsequent debate from scholars.

## CONCLUSION

Compared with science and technology, teaching and learning has progressed slowly. It has taken many centuries for educators to change the way they teach and it has taken many centuries for learners to change the way they learn. For centuries, teachers have clung dearly to the pedagogical model, serving only the interests of the minority. Only a few outstanding scholars such as Marx (1929) (2005) , Habermas (1971), Knowles, Mezirow (1981), and Brookfield (2001, 2005) have sought to innovate instructional methods in order to produce learners who are able to replace ideologies of the ruling class with their own. The authors of this article touched upon the essence of the newly advanced theory, critical theory, that can be used to liberate our teaching and learning in the new century, particularly online learning. As more and more universities rely on Web 2.0 technologies to deliver their courses, E-learning remains a huge research area in which researchers and scholars may apply critical theory and other schools of thought. In essence, the authors of this article addressed how we can liberate our teaching and learning in both the traditional classroom settings and in the virtual environment. We hope this article will spark some more research into how critical theory can help us change our teaching and learning, particularly in the online environment.

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