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Key Words: adult ESL, multi-theoretical, prior experience, democratic instruction

Abstract: This paper explores a multi-theoretical framework that capitalizes on the use of students' prior experiences in practicing culturally responsive education among adult English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, with an aim to promote language proficiency, socio-cultural competence, and personal growth, and therefore to facilitate holistic and democratic instruction.

The Exploration of a Multi-Theoretical Framework for Holistic and Democratic Adult ESL Instruction

Using students' prior experience has been regarded as an effective way to accommodate adult learning (Dewey, 1938; Lindeman, 1926; Mezirow, 1991; Wlodkowski, 1999) and practice culturally responsive education (Banks, 2001). Moreover, using students' prior experiences aids in facilitating English as a Second Language (ESL) learning (Diaz-Rico, 2012). While the use of prior experience in culturally responsive teaching has gained attention from educators at various levels, its integrative theoretical basis is unlikely to exist in the context of adult ESL instruction. Based on the nature and situational identity of adult ESL learners, who are often adults learning English as a second language in a new culture, it is important to construct a theoretical framework characterizing who they are (adult learning theory), how language and culture shapes their identities (socio-cultural theory), and how they acquire a second language (second language theory). These relationships do not work in a vacuum, but rather in the embodiment of adult ESL learners' prior experiences.

Lindeman (1926), Dewey (1938), and Merizow (1991) all emphasized the importance of personal development in education for adult learners. The goal of adult ESL education is not only language improvement. Personal growth should be a final educational goal for adult ESL learners. Capitalizing on students' prior experience and providing opportunities for learners to reflect on their experience is an effective way to achieve this goal.

In light of the cognitive theory of Connectionism, which has been psychologically applied to second language acquisition, the use of students' prior experience is assumed to activate the language elements in linguistic contexts so the overarching process of language learning is more meaningful and feasible. Also, involvement of students' prior experience helps with comprehending input and lowering learner anxiety in the process of second language learning (Krashen, 1982). In all, connecting with adult ESL learners' prior experience helps adult ESL learners improve their second language acquisition.

A view of education from a socio-cultural perspective emphasizes an understanding of the cultural world where students grow and develop (Alfred, 2003; Perez, 1998). For adult ESL learners, considering learning in socio-cultural contexts is especially significant, mainly because they are from diverse backgrounds with rich cultures and experiences.

While prior experience is important in developing holistic instruction in which students improve second language acquisition, social cultural competence, and personal growth, a sense

of democratic and critical multiculturalism in adult ESL classrooms is important in promoting social activism and awareness (Smoke, 1998). Dewey (1966) has also postulated, such a sense of democratic and critical multiculturalism shedding light on the dialectical relationship between individuals and society that is inseparable. Thus, the purpose of education is intimately connected with the active role of the citizen in a democracy. In this regard, use of prior experiences directs educators to avoid the pitfall of "oppression" in education, as noted by Freire (1972). When respecting and appreciating students' prior experiences, the power relationship between educators and students is likely to evaporate, creating space for dialogue, human dignity, freedom, and critical thinking in the teaching and learning process.

        Although the literature suggests the logical interconnection of adult learning theory, socio-cultural theory, and second language theory in effective adult ESL education, further research is warranted and being developed to directly expose this relationship and the effects of exploiting it.

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