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Critical HRD—Need for Emergence of Critters in Adult Education

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Abstract: Critters seek to expose, understand, and change the underlying causes of a phenomenon—the business of adult education. Adult education is foundational to the engagement of critical management studies (CMS). Critical HRD appears to be a bridge between CMS frameworks and Adult Education theories. Critters will ensure the complexities and breadth of influences get threaded for all stakeholders.

Introduction

Ambiguity of concept seems to be concurrent to any initiation to a new theoretical landscape, may it be in the field of power in management, positionality in organizational development, post-structuralism, or the business of adult education. When writers discuss *in toto* methods, models, conceptualizations, theories, and compendiums in identifying bridges to connect new knowledge, the same writers find themselves trying to wrap their collective arms around a constantly moving theoretical landscape. This literature review tries to evoke a similar bridge in understanding current HRD theories in adult education through a critical lens.

The Problem

Alvesson and Willmott's (1992) widely cited publication on "critical management studies" (CMS) became one of the catalysts in the burgeoning discipline of the same name. Although at times criticized for being too "critical" (Fournier & Grey, 2000), theorists and researchers have valued the nurturing of critical questions on power, interests, equity, challenging organizational structures, and knowledge legitimization (T. J. Fenwick, 2004). As such, the term "critters" at times have been used to denote people involved in critical management (Fournier & Grey, 2000, p. 8). Adler (2002) purports various voices of critters—*militant*, *humanist*, and *progressive*—that altogether provide a critical eye in enabling managers to be more productive and effective in how they take on their responsibilities and in performing their roles. Eden (2003) follows up the identification of critters as seeking to expose, understand, and change the underlying causes of any phenomenon; may it be organizational, managerial, or a theory-practice bridge.

Fournier & Grey (2000) indicated CMS' commitment to uncovering the "alternatives that have been effaced by management knowledge and practice" (p.8). CMS is broadly used as one of the methods of understanding organizational management, while HRD theories and models focus more upon the human resource issues that involves the relationships between the individuals and their organizations. The bridge between Critical HRD and Adult Education remains widely unbuilt. Therefore, a bridge may need to be identified so that practitioners once finished with their education can bring that critical lens to their workplaces. There seems to be a relationship between CMS and Critical HRD, as well as one between critical HRD and adult education, but there seems to be a lack of clear connection between CMS and Adult Education. This research seeks to explore the literature to investigate this to determine any bridges.

“Integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). CMS has grown exponentially since its emergence in the 1990s (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003) and this maturity calls for a review, critique, and the potential reconceptualization of the expanding and more diversified knowledge base of the topic as it continues to develop. When the literature review contributes to the discipline and its constituents, then the need for a literature review subsists (Torraco, 2005).

Conceptual Framework

The critical HRD literature is a developing and growing body of research that is partly fragmented in its approach as it has not been well-defined. There are several major variables that many of the studies focus upon, and into which much of the relevant research can be placed. The largest component is from critical management studies, the sub-discipline in management theory that focuses on a critical theoretical approach to the study of management (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992; W. R. Nord & Jermier, 1992). This area is growing with annual Critical Management Studies topics in conferences like the Academy of Management Conference, Academy of Human Resources Development conferences, and the Adult Education Research Conference. Another conceptual grouping found throughout the literature is an emphasis on postmodern and post-structural thinking (Grice & Humphries, 1997), including Foucault (Carter, McKinlay, & Rowlinson, 2002), Derrida (Learmonth, 2006), and feminism (Bierema & Storberg-Walker, 2007), all seen as counter to the traditional positivism found in management theory (Fournier & Grey, 2000; Valentin, 2006), that does not actively promote reflexivity (Barge, 2004; T. Fenwick, 2005; Holmes, Cockburn-Wooten, Motion, Zorn, & Roper, 2005). A third trend in the research literature explores how critical management studies is taught in academic business programs (Fulop, 2002; Grey, 2004; Catharine H. Monaghan & Cervero, 2006). One final trend directly researches power in organizational relationships (Bierema & D'Abundo, 2003; Deetz, 2003; Voronov, 2005; Voronov & Yorks, 2005). While these four conceptual structures pervade the literature, the authors initially identified the final one as the focus of this article as it acknowledges organizational power relationships, especially when it is directed toward strategic change (Voronov & Yorks, 2005) and employee/organizational alignment (Keefer & Mulliner, 2006). Further research provided evidence that a holistic approach to this integrated approach (Torraco, 2005) is a more sound framework for this research.

Methodology

The researchers initially scanned the literature and found three recurring keywords: *Critical Management Studies*, *Critical HRD*, and *Critical Pedagogy*. The sources included ProQuest, Emerald, EBSCOhost, Sage, Google Scholar, WilsonOmni, ERIC, and proceedings on the AERC and AHRD. Structuring conceptually the review of the literature, the authors' initial discussion regarding the bridge between Critical HRD and Adult Education resulted with a mind map of broad categories of critical HRD concepts with links to various adult learning theories. A starting point for the mind map was CMS, which branched to various topics and tangential sub-disciplines. The researchers individually read the literature, created a matrix, and hand-coded and identified key themes and patterns that emerged, following the Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Miles and Huberman (1994) frameworks for coding. The

result this review includes four category themes: (a) critical management studies, (b) postmodern / post-structural thinking, (c) academic programs, and (d) organizational power relationships. The limitation to this mind-map was three-fold: (1) focus on adults only, (2) articles should reflect adult learning, and (3) publication date of the majority of articles will be between years 2000-2007. After determining these various groups, the next step was to identify deeper relationships within each category upon completion of the literature search. The authors had two guiding questions—(1) What bridges may exist between Critical Management Studies (CMS), HRD, and Adult Education? and (2) What can Adult Learning theorists and practitioners gain from this knowledge?

Keyword Search	Overview of Critical Management Studies	Postmodern and Post-Structural Thinking	Academic Business Programs	Power in Organizational Relationships
Critical Management Studies (CMS)	Callahan (Callahan, 2007); Callahan, et al. (2007); Clegg (2006); Hatcher (2006); Learmonth (2006); Letiche (2006); Magala (2006); Phillips (2006); Sambrook (2007); Sambrook & Hatcher (2007) & Hatcher (2007); Grey & Willmott (2005); Hancock & Tyler (2004); Deetz (2003); Eden (2003); T. J. Fenwick (2003); Wray-Bliss (2003); Adler (2002); Grey & Willmott (2002); Alvesson & Deetz (2000); Fournier & Grey (2000); Alvesson & Willmott (1992); Nord & Jermier (1992)	Learmonth (2006); Fenwick (2005); Holmes, et al. (2005); Barge (2004); Voronov & Coleman (2003); Carter, et al. (2002); Walsh & Webber (2002) (2002); Grice & Humphries (1997)	Sambrook & Hatcher (2006); Willmott (2006); Holmes, et al. (2005); Barge (2004); Grey (2004); Elliott (2003); Reedy (2003); Smith (2003); Calas & Smircich (2002); Cunliffe et al. (2002), Fulop (2002); Grey & Willmott (2002); Gutierrez (2002); Nord (2002); Walsh & Weber (2002); Zald (2002a); Zald (2002b)	Callahan, et al. (2007); Dixon (2007); Hatcher (2007); Clegg, et al. (2006); Keefer & Mulliner, (2006); Letiche (2006); Willmott (2006); Fleming (2005); Gitlow (2005); Voronov & Yorks (2005); Clegg, et al. (2004); Rowlinson (2004); Sambrook (2004); Bierema (2003); Deetz (2003); Fenwick (2003); Nord (2003); Voronov & Coleman (2003); Carter, et al. (2002); Sotirin & Tyrell (1998)
Critical HRD	Callahan (2007); Callahan, et al. (2007); Sleezer (2004); Valentin (2006); Bierema & Fenwick (2005); Fenwick (2005); Woerkom (2004); Yang (2004); Elliott & Turnbull (2002)	Bierema & Storberg-Walker (2007); Storberg-Walker & Bierema (2006); Trehan (2004)	Miskovic & Hoop (2006); Monaghan & Cervero (2006); Grey (2004); Trehan (2004);	Hatcher (2007); Kim & Cervero (2007); Ty (2007); Githens (2007); Nathan & Whatley (2006); Richardson, et al. (2006); Thompson & Bettinger (2006); Woodall (2006); Stewart (2005)
Critical Pedagogy	Learmonth (2006); Giroux (2006); Sleezer (2004); Grey & Willmott (2005); Cunningham (2004); Hovey (2004); Monaghan (2004); Howard (2002)	Mitev (2006); Tappan (2006); Mejia (2002); Ledwith (2001)	Miskovic & Hoop (2006); Monaghan (2004); Trehan (2004); Elliott & Reynolds (2002); Grey (2002); Gutierrez (2002); Mejia (2002)	Cicmil & Hodgson (2006); Mejia (2002)

Table 1: Keyword-Grouping Matrix

Critical Analysis of the Literature

The authors conducted an evaluation of the four categories of literature listed in the methodology. Specifically, the authors will investigate correlations, connections, bridges, and gaps in the literature to understand any conjunction of thought between and among the respective theorists and critics.

Looking at the *Keyword Grouping Matrix* (Table 1) provides a landscape into the CMS, Critical HRD, and Critical Pedagogy landscapes. The *Overview of Critical Management Studies* shows the beginnings and general theoretical development of this sub-discipline over a 15-year period. *Postmodern and Post-Structural Thinking* exemplifies studies that have further defined how critical management theory as a framework is explored from a postmodern lens that challenges an objective, status quo worldview. *Academic Business Programs* groups similar concepts involving an academic perspective focused on preparing students for the workplace. *Power in Organizational Relationships* explores how organizations can continue to be viable due to globalization and shifting organizational paradigms.

The initial categorization of the articles in this review was not always successful due to the interconnectivities of author themes and topics. Authors like Bierema, Fenwick, and Hatcher, among others, provided bridges that proved to be useful when read together. A thinking that CMS would apply only in Organizational Relationships or only in HRD would be a mistake. A more accurate approach, it seems, is an understanding of the way CMS threads its meaning into various contexts and provides opportunities for further learning when weaved between various categories.

Conclusions and Future Research Suggestions

With CMS transitioning into a more mature discipline, from this review, Critical HRD appears to be the bridge between CMS and Adult Education. With the current fragmented research and developing academic HRD programs, a holistic approach including a visual representation of the landscape would benefit the writer in understanding various points to the bridges created by Critical HRD towards how a greater understanding of Adult Education.

Future research needs to be done from all the perspectives. Developing a threaded discussion of various thought leaders and researchers and how their work integrates between Adult Learning and Organizational Development would be a step towards further understanding the relationships between Adult Education and workplace performance.

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