

The Role of Adult Education in Social Change: A Critical Review of Stephen Brookfield's Scholarship

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of adult education in social change based on Stephen Brookfield's scholarship. A critical review is done to analyze Brookfield's thoughts and views about adult education. After reviewing four articles written by Brookfield, we found that there are three main roles of adult education formulated by Brookfield. First, adult education takes a role in social justice; second, adult education takes a role in social and political change, and third, adult education plays a role in social and community development. Besides, we also discuss the tradition of Brookfield scholarship which is mainly influenced by Marxism and understanding his identity as white Englishman and neutral academician who defends voices of marginal people rooted from his rich experiences work with minority group. Last, we bring up the educational practices suggested from Brookfield's that views education related to social responsibility and policy which is not merely about teaching practice in classrooms. It is more a practical and critical education agenda that can solve public and social problem which inform policy making and concern on social injustice in the community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this article, I highlight Stephen Brookfield's scholarship as a renowned expert in adult education. Brookfield has been known widely as a figure in the field of adult education. Even though they are also well known in critical thinking and post-secondary teaching, I will focus on exploring his scholarship experience and endurance in adult education concept. Many experts have defined the term of adult education. Brookfield (1993) himself articulated adult education as a self-directed learning which voices a power or political idea that can alter the social life massively through some practical and critical education agenda. His definition seems triggering to change individual and societal condition. These sparks of thought are worth to analyze deeply as his rich experience in the field of adult education. This analysis might help me to understand his thought and view regarding the discourse in adult education.

After researching his background and works related to adult education, I will present 4 articles that best describe his view of adult education. 4 articles mainly discussed the adult education as a tool for social change. He also addresses the social injustice in a particular community, institution, and most importantly a nation. My further explanation in this essay will elaborate 5 common elements which will aid me to cover the scholarship of Brookfield in the field of adult education. Those elements are the main themes of his four works, his intellectual tradition, educational practices, identity, and how far his idea relevance to my work experience, educational policy, and general adult education discourse.

After looking four articles related to Adult Education by Stephen Brookfield, I found the main theme appear in each article which focus on the role of adult education in social justice and social and political change. First article discusses the unproblematic Eurocentrism in the discourse of adult education in the United States. Brookfield (2003) pointed out the work of

Cornel West and Lucius T. Outlaw Jr, two prominent African American scholars who racialize the discourse of adult education while Euro-American tradition tend to ignore the issue of race and dominate the field. The second articles draws the concept of self-directed learning as a political idea which is technically enhancing critical practice of adult education that take role in awakening critical spirit of adults in America (Brookfield, 1993). The third article explains the connection between adult education and management education, lifelong learning, organizational and workplace learning, corporate social responsibility (Brookfield, 2006). Furthermore, it explains how adult education can work outside those institutions such as concern to social issue and promote political change. The last article explore the conceptual analysis of community adult education taking place in the United States, Canada, and Britain which address the community development and try to figure out the different between adult education for the community, in the community, and of the community (Brookfield, 1983).

There are similarities of four articles written by Brookfield. He always connects adult education with social change that is inclined to oppress the minority group. As he quoted in Apple (2002) in the first article stating that Eurocentrism which portrays the White People reflects the racial membership of official knowledge producers in the field of adult education hence the generation of self-directed, critical adult learners in a democratic environment is shrouded in whiteness and invisibility (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000 cited in Brookfield, 2003). Furthermore, it is more clearly how he voices the social change through adult education in the second article. Brookfield (1993) stated how self-directed learning provide a way to become a self-controller hence open a way to work collectively at changing the political culture of our institution, rather than trying to learn difficulty to ensure our individual success.

Moreover, the third article gives us the same vibe how Brookfield proposed a political change through the power of adult education. He said that “if adults start to see situation in their private lives as concrete manifestation of broader social political contradiction, they will see that changing their individual lives is impossible without political action” (Brookfield, 2006, p. 838). In the fourth article, Brookfield (1983) asserted that the concept of community education should be liberated which erases the grouping of people by class, status, and power. He added that education can become the arm of radical social action that advance the minority group. Another similarities are three of articles clearly mention the context of study which took place in the United States which is quite sensitive with race problem and recognized as capitalist country that is often criticized because its ideology that oppress the minority. Also, the ideology is the antithesis of what Brookfield proposes in his critical theory explanation which is influenced by Marxism.

Despite the similarities, those articles show a bit difference. While the first and the second article explain more about ideological matter that happens between the dominant and the marginalized people, the third and fourth article address the educational practice in adult education. Brookfield (2006) explained how management education takes roles in adult class, team learning, organization, and workplace and vice versa how adult educational perspective could contribute to management education. Meanwhile, Brookfield (1983) in the fourth article draws the role of adult education in community such as designing education program, setting learning agenda, and being responsible for community activities. However, the identification between adult education for the community, in the community, and of the community is hardly to digest since Brookfield does not clearly distinguish the function and purpose of the terms. For details themes that appear in four articles, I will present the further explanation as follows. His first until fourth articles discoursed here published in 2003, 1993, 2006, and 1983 respectively.

2. DISCUSSIONS

The Role of Adult Education in Social Justice

The social injustice issue mainly problematized in the Brookfield’s first article discussing the recognition of black intellectuals in the discourse of Adult Education which dominated by

Eurocentric Whiteness (Brookfield, 2003). It is not problematized by common academicians in the field where Eurocentric Whiteness regarded as the positive value and unspoken norm (Brookfield, 2003). The central ideas of adult education conceptualized by Eurocentric thought tend to ignore the African American Interest. Hence, some of African American Intellectual in adult education such as Outlaw reveals the true needs, interest, values, and contribution of African Americans with helping them achieve a critical understanding of their situation in combining Black Nationalism and critical theory (Brookfield, 2003). To manifest the ideal, Brookfield proposed in his article saying that “Black intellectuals should be scholar-activist who are grounded in the experience and struggle of the African American community” (2003, p.510). Consider Brookfield as white scholar that participates in voicing this racializing adult education might be very challenging to him. Racializing adult education means deconstructing Eurocentric practice and opening discourse to include philosophies, research approach, and classroom or community practice that reflect other racial traditions (Brookfield, 2003). Even though his view about racializing adult education seems clear, He is part of the people who are being ignorant to the issue. I personally recognize his scholarship that actively voices social justice to the minority group and recommends practitioners and scholars to actively work on this matter. Nonetheless, he will not achieve the true reality of what African-American Intellectuals perceived in this discourse since he is not the process of struggle as a black race. Therefore his critical review might not fully cover the realm of African-American scholars.

The Role of Adult Education in Social and Political Change

Another theme discussed in his articles is social and political change. It is not far different from the previous theme that challenges the dominant group. Brookfield is very carefully stated his view regarding the need for social reconstruction which can be initiated by adult learners. Brookfield (1993) thought that adults' self-directed learning is a power or political idea which can alter the social life massively through some practical and critical education agenda. In other words, self-direction is a cultural tradition where adults could sound their voices to against dominated and repressive interest. Brookfield (1993) added that the intellectual heart of self-direction is an issue of control which can be split with power. It is a transformative and emancipatory education where adults are supposed to apply critical theory and pedagogy for political change. Furthermore, he thinks that self-directed learners are humanistic adult educators who can break down all political confusion into simple reductionist and technical idea. It is self-direction learning which thought as a powerful and infinite flexibility of hegemony due to the intellectual process within it. Furthermore, Brookfield (2003) addressed that the most valuable adult education work within social movement is the need for adult educator to behave as organic intellectual which is a person who stay attuned to the best of what mainstream has to offer such as paradigm, viewpoint, and methods should be born in mind and criticized. However, Brookfield's idea is not quite practical if we want to touch the heart of youth. This idea sound very complicated in people's lives generally, hence inviting adults to the movement might need long time and hard effort.

The Role of Adult Education in Social and Community Development

This theme seems different from previous themes which are too obvious in challenging the oppressive group. In spite of drawing the attention of massive societal change, Brookfield also showed his idea on how adult education practically can help social and community development. Adult education of the community is closely connected to community development as Compton and McClusky (1980) cited in Brookfield (1983) have conceptualized the relationship as community education for development. They added community education for development represents the how (practice and program) and the why (theory and principles) of teaching social and behavioral technology to community groups. Moreover, Brookfield (2006) has mentioned that adult education is closely related to management education where students as adult learners could be seen as co-creators of knowledge and co-construction of curriculum. In addition, management education shaped adult education tradition to apply corporate social responsibility as contribution to social, cultural and environmental life.

The Tradition of Brookfield Scholarship

Having analyzed four articles of Brookfield, I tend to see that his tradition in adult education mostly influenced by Marxism view that challenge the existing ideology particularly in his argument about critical theory and practice. He is well known by his expertise in critical thinking theory (Brookfield & Johnson, 2010). In his articles, he proposed how important of doing critical theory which is rooted from Karl Marx's socialism. Based on his articles, he addresses the inequality in social life and he supports adult education in social political change. As discussed in the article about the connection between adult education and management education, in the end of his talk, he argued that a structuralized view of the world is one that emphasize how individual decision are framed by much broader social structures and economic force (Brookfield, 2006). Brookfield considers individual change depend on large society as Mills (1954) stated that a person who has personal trouble should turn his concern into social issue. Brookfield also sees society cannot be changed if individuals do not want to manifest his private life into social issue. The only way to change society is through collective movement that provokes political action. He then concludes with giving advice that adults should take a chance to political action because they own influence decision power. He supports a social change from the oppressed people.

Furthermore in his work, "Racializing the Discourse of Adult Education" he discussed critical tradition of African American Intellectuals. I assume Brookfield intellectual tradition has something to do with Marxism as he fluently describes the history of critical tradition of African American. He thought that learning to understand and dismantle racist power structures as part of a broader movement of social transformation in adult education project (Brookfield, 2003). He then quoted that this tradition mostly acknowledged by left-academic intellectual such as Marx, Foucault, and Gramsci, who have much contribution to keep the hope of a revolutionary future alive in African American Community (Brookfield, 2003). His scholarship tradition more clearly as he mentioned (2003) how Marxist takes a role in Black theology in the black oppression of capitalist America in the developing world. Brookfield's tradition seems very critical towards the existing ideology as he tries to actively voice the current social imbalance which has been happening from Karl Marx and Foucault's era with his scholarship in adult education. He keep maintaining voices of oppressed people which marginalized by the system in his academic tradition and works.

The Identity of Brookfield

Brookfield began his teaching career in adult education when working with courses in basic college skills for student who had not been able to go to school and now wished to re-enter education at the college level (Brookfield & Jonathan, 2010). This ordinary and precious experience is starting points for Brookfield how he managed to work with minority group of people who are not easily afford colleges because of many internal and external challenges. We can clearly comprehend his initial experience influence how he faces and thinks about the world around him. In most of his works, he always addresses the social injustice and promote a social change which initiated by adult learners. With his rich experience, he tries to see the whole picture of community without repressing and marginalizing the minority group like he discussed in his work, "Racializing the Discourse of Adult Education" written in 2003. Despite of his background as a White English male, he put himself as a neutral academician when drawing the issue of racialization in the discourse of adult education in the United States. He even calls for practitioners and scholars to actively promote to challenge the perspective and thinking which tend to ignore the issue of race in Euro-American tradition (Brookfield, 2003).

His racial membership as White is not a challenge for him. The identity he own, helps him to see both sides. He might successfully understand the feeling of being minority group which is always seen and treated unfairly. As a white Englishman, he has no experiential, visceral access to the philosophy born and struggle that comprises the central dimension of African American thought (Brookfield, 2003). However, this experience can shape his understanding how to position himself in academic and intellectual endeavor when addressing the sensitive

issue such as racism and the oppressed people. In brief, his experience of working with minority group can be clearly seen in his works which defend the voices of marginal people.

The Educational Practices Suggested from Brookfield's Articles

Four articles written by Brookfield are mainly discussed the educational practice related to social policy that can only be applied through policy level practice. He does not much explain the educational practice happening in classroom, school, or university. Hence, it is not easy to describe practically and technically in the area of teaching practice. In his article, Brookfield recommends to social policy level such as government, politician, and academician as he (2003) offered recommendations to practitioners and scholars for actively exploring adult education's role in challenging the "myth of neutral, non-impositional adult educators." This recommendation is only designated for intellectual and academician who work on in the field of adult education. Besides, he also advocates to positioning self-directed learning in adult education as critical practice for changing the nation. He calls for adult educators and learners to be more strategic in building critical practice to stand against repressive interest (Brookfield, 1993). This idea seems designated to policy maker to be more concern on social injustice in the community. Even though his educational practice is not applicable directly in the classroom management, I reckon that he prefers to work on the public and social problem which has more big implication in the nation.

However, he does not fail to address what educational practice can be done practically and technically. He stated (2006) that good management education taking place in organization can be applied by how intense the talking practice between team and the leader. He suggested that there should be a regular talking practice such as meeting to explore was on their mind and tap into each other's experiences to gain insights into the problem they were experiencing (Brookfield, 2006). In addition, Brookfield (2006) gives advice to members of organization to become better at critical thinking whether it is corporate, nonprofit, proprietary, a higher education institution especially in corporation to take advantage of corporate social responsibility effectively when facing social, cultural, and environmental problem that might be caused by the corporation.

3. CONCLUSION

In this analysis I have described Brookfield's four articles which explain the field of adult education. After analyzing his scholarship such as the themes, tradition, educational practice, identity, and his works' implication in the general education discourse, I conclude that Brookfield is very concerned to the problems that oppress the minority. His main themes describe the social injustice in adult education and the role of adult education in social political change and social community development. In his works and intellectual tradition, it can be seen that he is influenced by Marxism's critical theory which challenges the repressive interest. In addition, he also addresses some educational practices in management education that can help adult learner in lifelong learning and workplace learning. His identity as White Englishman who has rich experiences working with the minority group and black people shape his view and paradigm that actively sound the minority interest. Most importantly, he recommends and calls for the social movement by building critical practice of education that involve adult educators and learners.

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