

THEORY AND METHOD IN HIGHER EDUCATION RESEARCH

Edited by Jeroen Huisman
and Malcolm Tight

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VOLUME 7

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THEORY AND METHOD IN HIGHER EDUCATION
RESEARCH VOLUME 7

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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

This is the 2021 volume in the annual series *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research*, which we launched in 2013 in the belief that there was a need to provide a forum specifically for higher education researchers to discuss issues of theory and method.

The contributions in this volume lean more towards theory than method. Thus, we have Jogie discussing the application of, and responses to, critical race theory; Torres-Purroy and Mas-Alcolea examining the use of communities of practice theory; Wilmot and McKenna exploring the popularity of Legitimation Code Theory in the South African context; Dusdal, Zapp, Marques and Powell linking institutional and relational theory for the analysis of higher education organizations; and Smith, Wofford, Friedensen, Stanfield and Jackson considering the complexity of applying theory in higher education research.

More methodological contributions include those of Hauke on participant ethnography; Mas-Alcolea and Torres-Purroy on the benefits of combining shadowing with narrative interviewing; and O'Dea evaluating the use of portrait methodology. Taking a quantitative perspective, Litson and Feldon stress the importance of measurement invariance in research.

Combining elements of theory and method, Arnold, Badenhorst and Hoben discuss decolonization using indigenous principles.

As in previous years, the volume displays an international authorship, with contributions from Canada, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, the UK and the USA.

Anyone interested in contributing a chapter to a future volume is invited to get in touch with either, but preferably both, of the editors.

Jeroen Huisman
Malcolm Tight

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THEORIES ON TRIAL: DECONSTRUCTING AND DECOLONIZING HIGHER AND ADULT LEARNING CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Christine Helen Arnold, Cecile Badenhorst
and John Hoben

ABSTRACT

Decolonizing involves dismantling deeply entrenched colonial systems of knowledge and power by disrupting colonial patterns of thought, questioning how teaching and learning occurs, and critiquing the colonial practices that are merged into the fabric of higher and adult education. Within this process, scholars and practitioners engage in interrogating teaching and learning approaches and developing a critical consciousness regarding what knowledge is valued and how this value is acquired. Within higher and adult education, limited research has explicitly considered the ways in which conceptions of andragogy and its accompanying instructional approaches might be deconstructed within the context of decolonization. The purpose of this chapter is to deconstruct and decolonize foundational higher and adult learning conceptual and theoretical frameworks that are routinely embedded within courses and programs. The conceptual and theoretical frameworks selected and analyzed include self-directed learning, transformative learning, and action learning as conventional examples of individual and collective instructional approaches employed within higher and adult learning settings. Maōri scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) nine characteristics of theory that contribute to colonizing discourses and 25 Indigenous projects/principles are employed as the lenses that frame this analysis. These lenses include social science and

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methodological approaches and strategies that decolonize populations and promote Indigenous epistemologies.

Keywords: Decolonization; Indigenous principles; andragogy; critical andragogy; self-directed learning; transformational learning; action learning

INTRODUCTION

Higher and adult education can be challenging for those not aligned with dominant knowledge systems. Academic success, then, often comes at the cost of losing a cultural identity. Some feel an “overwhelming pressure to assimilate... [and] may choose to leave college altogether in an act of self-preservation” (Reyes, 2014, p. 48). Others enroll but stay silent, invisible on campus in an attempt to keep their identity intact. Indigenous students often experience multiple intersectionalities – gendered, racial, and cultural (Reyes, 2014). The development of trust in learning and the creation of safe spaces, we know as educators, are conducive to learning. However, for many sectors of society, higher and adult education classrooms are not safe spaces (Atleo, 2013). Racist orientations are located in the subtexts of curriculums creating structurally embedded inequalities. Hanson and Jaffe (2020) argue “colonial education, including adult education, played a central role in upholding systems of hierarchy and inequality and supported the domination of the weak by the strong – socially, politically, and, especially economically” (p. 575).

Decolonizing Calls to Action

Calls to action for decolonizing universities across North America and the European Union have been issued resulting in Oxford University’s Rhodes Must Fall campaign highlighting its colonial legacies; United Kingdom National Union of Students’ (NUS) “Why is My Curriculum White?” and #LiberateMyDegree campaigns challenging Eurocentric domination and lack of diversity; and the University of Washington’s Decolonizing UW intersectional campaign committed to smashing systems of oppression in higher education, among others. As scholars and practitioners working within adult and post-secondary education studies programs, it has been requested by senior administration that we address these calls to action, an exercise that our colleagues across jurisdictions nationally and internationally are encountering as they make amendments and additions to their practice.

We acknowledge that decolonization efforts are not without contradictions and ambiguities and in recognizing our positionality aim to work in solidarity to unsettle these historical structures. We are moving forward knowing that this will be a long journey and, therefore, are still learning to appreciate the complexities involved. We identify as white scholars and recognize that the process of decolonization for members of dominant cultures is one that requires an ongoing examination of complicity with hegemonic power structures and necessitates that we educate ourselves about oppressed knowledges, cultures, and histories.

Smith's (2012) characteristics of theory and principles provide a means for us to situate our agency as a white settler culture who wants to act as allies in countering the ongoing historical oppression of Indigenous peoples and their communities. Recognizing our historical and contextual positions of privilege and power, we want to create spaces where we can discuss privilege, epistemic colonization, and taken-for-granted understandings of knowledge and theory.

Higher and Adult Learning Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Within higher and adult education, in addition to andragogy, the following foundational higher and adult learning conceptual and theoretical frameworks are routinely embedded within courses and programs: self-directed learning, experiential learning, transformative learning, action learning, and problem-based learning. However, limited research has explicitly considered the ways in which conceptions of andragogy and its accompanying instructional approaches might be deconstructed within the context of decolonization, although literature in the fields of higher and adult learning has begun to demonstrate distinctive trends toward increasing critical and cultural diversity (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). The latter includes research centering on cultural difference and its relationship to andragogy, where scholars have recognized the complex nature of white privilege and teaching future educators and adult learners about positionality and race within modern society (Clemons, 2019).

As a means of framing our investigation, we selected and analyzed self-directed learning, transformative learning, and action learning frameworks as conventional examples of individual and collective instructional approaches employed within higher and adult learning settings. These frameworks are associated with current critiques of Malcom Knowles (1968) conceptions of andragogy, which emphasizes the need to shift attention away from the existing conceptions of pedagogy to focus on the needs, desires, and preferences of the adult learner as a more autonomous and mature learner (Darbyshire, 1993). As a means of framing this analysis, Maōri scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (2012) nine characteristics of theory that contribute to colonizing discourses and 25 Indigenous projects/principles are employed as the critical lenses guiding our deconstruction and decolonization exercise. The principles include social science and methodological approaches and strategies that decolonize populations and promote Indigenous independence.

DECOLONIZATION

Structures of colonial paradigms exist historically in most Western curricula, which include instructional designs and approaches, learning objectives and outcomes, assessment and evaluation schemes, and grading and reward systems. Although sometimes embedded and hidden in the subtexts of the curricula, these paradigms are complicit in constructing marginalized knowledge systems as the "other" (Alteo, 2013; Hanson & Jaffe, 2020). Systems of difference that are

implicitly conveyed through these subtexts maintain and legitimize inequality in ways that are largely invisible. Students are encouraged to assimilate, epistemically, to the portrayed dominant knowledge systems through regular review cycles and feedback.

Decolonization involves deconstructing and dismantling these deeply entrenched knowledge systems and encouraging educators, scholars, and adult learners to develop a critical consciousness about how knowledge is constructed and what knowledge is valued (Hanson & Jaffe, 2020). Recognizing our own positions and contributions to harm are part of the decolonizing project. In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a larger political project. Revealing underlying constructions is only one part of the process. It may seem like a merely academic endeavor, but it is part of opening up the space for dialog around the idea that research and theory occurs within a set of social and political conditions and is never neutral. There is a need for historical and critical analysis to expose ways of thinking that have become taken for granted (Smith, 2012).

Characteristics of Theory

Smith (2012) argues that theory is one of the ways that ideological constructions and representations of the “other” are fabricated. Theories are steeped in assumptions, motivations, and values, which inform the content we communicate. She identifies nine characteristics of theory that contribute to colonizing discourses. Western theories told through history indulge in *totalizing discourses*. As Smith (2012) argues, “The concept of totality assumes the possibility and desirability of being able to include absolutely all knowledge into a coherent whole” (p. 31). These theories also assume *universality*, as they assume that there are fundamental characteristics and values that are shared by all peoples and societies. Time and *chronology* are also commonly located in Western theories. Chronology is important because it allows events to be located in time, thus making them real. It also permits one to go back and devise explanations for why things have previously occurred historically. Chronology, although viewed as universal, is culturally interpreted. *Development* is another notable characteristic, as there is an assumption that progress is considered desirable and positive, and that people and societies develop over time from simple primitive to civilized. Development often involves stages that one progresses through. Linked to development is the *self-actualizing human subject*. This is the belief that humans (and societies) necessarily move in stages from basic needs through to more sophistication in terms of emotions, intellect, and morality. A further characteristic is the assumption of *one coherent narrative*. This is the idea that historically “facts” can be ordered into one truth. Contested stories and multiple discourses are not part of these discourses. The idea that history (and theory) is *innocent* also underlies many Western theories. Theory, by nature, is seen as neutral and unbiased. Smith (2012) also argues that history is often constructed around *binary categories* that are often linked to chronology. For example, concepts of discovery are divided into before and after. Finally, underlying history and theory are strong threads of *patriarchy* where women are regarded as

incapable of some stages of development and progress and are often seen as not significant or not present in history. In addition, theory developed by research conducted on men is automatically assumed to apply to women as well. Overall, [Smith \(2012\)](#) is primarily concerned with whether Indigenous or marginalized people can see themselves in these theories.

Indigenous Projects/Principles

[Linda Tuhiwai Smith's \(2012\)](#) 25 Indigenous projects/principles located within the progressive publication, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, frame this analysis and include social science and methodological approaches and strategies that decolonize populations and promote Indigenous independence. The principles intersect with the agenda for Indigenous research alongside documenting effective decolonizing practices for interacting and learning with one another that reflect Indigenous values and orientations. [Smith's \(2012\)](#) methodology articulates research approaches and strategies that decolonize populations and promote Indigenous self-determination, and these methods are also applicable when approaching teaching, learning, supervision, and connections on campuses. [Table 1](#) provides an overview of these inspirational principles that are reimagining pedagogies and andragogies across our institutions.

While it is not possible to provide a detailed summary outlining all of the principles listed within the table above, a few essential examples of the ways in which Indigenous people are advancing the agenda of reclaiming, reconstructing, and reformulating Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and languages are outlined for familiarization ([Smith, 2012](#)):

- *Connecting* – The project of connecting incorporates Indigenous creation stories that “link people through genealogy to the land, to stars and other places in the universe, to birds and fish, animals, insects and plants. To be connected is to be whole” ([Smith, 2012](#), p. 149). Examples include linking programs connecting the descendants of “stolen children” to their families and

Table 1. 25 Indigenous Projects/Principles.

Claiming	Testimonies	Storytelling	Celebrating Survival	Remembering
Indigenizing and indigenist processes	Intervening	Revitalizing and regenerating	Connecting	Reading
Writing and theory-making	Representing	Gendering	Envisioning	Reframing
Restoring	Returning	Networking	Naming	Democratizing and indigenist governance
Protecting	Creating	Negotiating	Discovering the beauty of our knowledge	Sharing

Note: Indigenous projects/principles reframed from [Smith \(2012\)](#).

connecting people to the traditional lands they are from by concentrating on restoration rituals and practices (Smith, 2012).

- *Reframing* – The project of reframing focuses on “the need to take control over the ways in which Indigenous issues and social problems are discussed and handled. One of the reasons why so many of the social problems which beset Indigenous communities are never solved is that the issues have been framed in a particular way” (Smith, 2012, p. 154). Examples include governments and agencies failing to appreciate that many social problems Indigenous people experience are related to historical challenges that have been encountered (Smith, 2012).
- *Creating* – The project of creating concerns “transcending the basic survival mode through using a resource or capability that every Indigenous community has retained throughout colonization – the ability to create and be creative” (Smith, 2012, p. 159). Examples include the spirit of creating and imagination that is required to rise above circumstances, and there are many programs that have incorporated Indigenous elements such as ideas and beliefs explaining the origins of the world and environment that are located within metaphors and mythic tales (Smith, 2012).
- *Sharing* – The project of sharing gives priority to knowledge distribution between Indigenous peoples and their networks, as “sharing contains views about knowledge being a collective benefit and knowledge being a form of resistance... sharing is a process that is responsive to the marginalized contexts in which indigenous communities exist” (Smith, 2012, p. 162). Examples include community gatherings with oral presentations that allow for information to surface regarding issues and events and are supplemented with local media reports on Indigenous issues (Smith, 2012).

The section that follows provides a critical discussion of Knowles’ (1968) andragogy and critical andragogy, as the latter is encouraging an examination of the powerful influence of Western thinking on non-Western and Indigenous cultures.

ANDRAGOGY IN HIGHER AND ADULT EDUCATION

As a starting point for the conceptual and theoretical framework analysis that will follow, it is integral that andragogy and its importance within higher and adult education is considered. These frameworks are associated and situated within Malcolm Knowles (1968) conceptions of andragogy, which advocated a new approach to teaching adults that recognized these learners prefer to integrate learning into their own experience, they like to take more control over their learning, and they prefer learning that is concrete and contextualized in terms of the learner’s ability to perform social and occupational roles (Knowles, 1980). Andragogy assists educators in conceptualizing how they might effectively meet the unique needs of learners who are typically older, more mature, and have more life experience. Unlike children, adult learners need learning spaces with more flexibility, autonomy, and control, since they are primarily intrinsically motivated

and have a desire to understand why they should learn particular material (Forrest & Peterson, 2006). Knowles (1968) strove to provide clear distinctions between child and adult learning, and over time, revised the initial assumptions guiding the theory to avoid generalizations that did not hold true for all adult learners, which include:

- Adult learning moves from dependency toward increasing self-directedness/autonomy;
- Adult learning utilizes knowledge and life experiences;
- Adult learning is goal-oriented;
- Adult learning is relevancy-oriented; and
- Adult learning highlights practicality and performance-centered learning activities.

Although many scholars embraced Knowles' model, they also noted the lack of empirical data to support the theory and questioned whether the model reinforced dominant social norms by failing to recognize a diverse range of student identities (Pratt, 1993). Scholars began to ask whether dominant norms regarding race, gender, class, and sexuality were unexamined assumptions reinforced by andragogy. Critics also questioned the tenability of Knowles' distinction between pedagogy and andragogy as one that was not based in fact but consisted of a series of overly broad generalizations that stand in the way of more critical forms of pedagogical practice (Darbyshire, 1993). Some researchers have found the effectiveness of andragogy's assumptions about how adults prefer to learn are mixed, whereas others have focused their attention on developing methods to assess the effectiveness of andragogical approaches (Rachal, 2002).

Critical Andragogy and Its Prominence

Realizations that adult learners vary in their educational purposes and the importance of examining learner identity and context have launched a new direction in theorizing andragogy. As a result, the question of identity and intersectionality became part of the ongoing debate surrounding the validity of the andragogical model (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Increasingly scholarship began to focus on the need for a theory of andragogy to encompass cultural difference and the need to teach future educators about the dynamics of positionality and race within modern society. Here, scholars have gestured toward what Clemons (2019) has termed "critical andragogy," an approach that "recognizes the nuances of working with adult learners... [but also] argues that all learners, regardless of their age, desire and deserve respect, are internally motivated and self-directed when given opportunities for autonomy and goal setting, and are highly engaged when the learning experiences are relevant and practical" (Summerlin & Ponder, 2020, p. 1119). This is an important contribution to the andragogical framework, as Clemons (2019) argues that "the discrete fields of critical theory, critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, and transformative learning embody the subthemes of a derivative field titled critical andragogy" (p. 86).

Clemons (2019) sees this new space as a terrain of struggle against what he terms “capitalistic notions” that have led to educational reforms that have disrupted higher and adult education. Given the broader critical inheritance of higher and adult education and the fundamental importance of andragogy, this work may closely align with contemporary efforts to make higher and adult education institutions more open, inclusive, and equitable, while still retaining a pragmatic focus on the learner. Some scholars have commenced referring to “the field of andragogy” or “andragogical approaches” making it hard to differentiate between Knowles’ original conceptual model and adult learning theories more generally (Peltz, 2019, p. 100). However, this trend has also opened innovative and important intersections between different subfields in higher and adult education, as scholars continue to examine the powerful influence of Western epistemologies on non-Western and Indigenous cultures in order to construct a more “multicultural andragogy” (Peltz, 2019). Unfortunately, little research has explicitly addressed the deconstruction of andragogy through a decolonial lens, although literature in the field of higher and adult learning has begun to demonstrate a distinct shift toward increasing critical and cultural diversity.

The section that follows delivers an analysis of self-directed learning, transformative learning, and action learning frameworks according to Smith’s (2012) nine characteristics of theory that contribute to colonizing discourses and 25 projects/principles, an exercise that involves a critical deconstruction and decolonization of these conventional conceptualizations.

SELF-DIRECTED, TRANSFORMATIVE, AND ACTION LEARNING FRAMEWORKS

While there are several higher and adult conceptual and theoretical frameworks, we have purposively selected self-directed learning, transformative learning, and action learning frameworks as conventional examples of individual and collective instructional approaches. While self-directed learning and transformative learning are viewed as individual instructional approaches, action learning is considered a collective instructional approach, as small groups work on real problems and collectively learn from one another as a team. All higher and adult learning frameworks have particular applications and techniques associated with them, and these selections are a few of the most commonly accepted and applied within higher and adult learning settings, often with limited critical consideration. Table 2 provides an overview of the learning frameworks selected, the scholars that championed the concepts, and the defining characteristics, which are supplemented within the analysis that follows.

Self-directed Learning

Higher and adult learning theories have largely focused on meeting the needs of highly independent and self-determined learners. Self-directed learning is one such approach to learning in which the learner is the principal decision-maker,