Article

The Ethics of Radical and Transformative Education

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Abstract

This article presents a framework for ethics for radical and transformative education. Taking as a starting point ethical perspectives by which educators of adults are justified in imposing upon, coercing, and manipulating adult learners in the name of social justice, this article highlights the necessary connection between pedagogies and learning outcomes. It positions democracy, with its concomitant respect for human dignity, as the raison d'être of the field of adult education. Therefore, adult education practice should support democratic capabilities, respect learner autonomy, and allow for plurality. From both consequentialist and deontological ethical perspectives, it is argued that methods of instruction that undermine democracy cannot also be claimed to support democracy.

Keywords

ethics, radical education, transformative education, democracy, civic learning

For those interested in radical or transformative adult education, there exists an ever-present danger that comes from our desire to be effective educators. Namely, we strive to change people. At first glance this desire is not only understandable, it seems laudable. We are trying to improve the world or to help people live better lives (however defined). But it can also be treacherous, as we envision how learners will transform into our image of what and how they should be.

In saying that there is a danger in wanting to change people, we acknowledge the seeming contradiction: helping people change is precisely the role of education. Of

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course educators should want their students to learn, and we know this may open up new possibilities for their lives, perhaps leading to radical or transformative changes. What we find problematic is not the inevitable vision that every educator has, either implicitly or explicitly, for the role of education in learners' lives, but rather, it is:

> the premise that the educator knows the correct worldview and the constraints from which a learner must be liberated … Even when educators believe their worldview is justified and laudable, it hints at indoctrination rather than emancipatory education, and anyone on the receiving end of it is justified in feeling disrespected. (Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020, p. 300)

There is an ethical conundrum here that needs to be teased out a bit more. Adult education has a responsibility not only to react to the very real problems of inequality, oppression, and injustice in the world, but also to provide new alternatives, to co-shape the turning points of societal discussions, and to anticipate future developments (Friedenthal-Haase, 2014; Zeuner, 2020). In working toward a more just world, and especially if such efforts are to arise from the democratic principle of humans as agents, rather than authoritative, top-down strategies, then adult education has a crucial role to play. The question is not whether adult educators should address these issues, but rather how and using what ethical framework.

We address the traditions of radical and transformative education because they are most explicit in their goals to enact dramatic changes. Historically, what we now call radical education came from anarchist, Marxist, and Freudian Left origins, and is strongly influenced today by Paulo Freire's radical conscientization, as well as critical approaches to education, such as those emanating from the Frankfurt School's critical social theory, radical feminism, and critical race theory (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 148). The commonality linking these traditions under the banner of radical adult education is their focus on creating profound societal change. By transformative education, we refer to the broad scholarship that has amassed under the name of transformative learning, beginning with Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation (1978), but now including a wide range of approaches with the common focus of education that results in "significant and irreversible changes in the way a person experiences, conceptualizes, and interacts with the world" (Hoggan, 2016, p.71).

In this article, we review and critique a theory of adult education practice that is explicit in its justifications for methods we find problematic. Then, we offer an ethical framework for adult education that is especially applicable to radical and transformative orientations.

Pedagogy of Coercion

In the name of social justice, Baptiste (2000) presents his *pedagogy of coercive restraint*, in contrast to what he dismissively calls "educational niceness" (p. 6). We

take Baptiste's approach as our point of departure because it presents in crystalized form certain tendencies, attitudes, and practices that we see as fairly common (Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020). We also draw on this theory because it has influenced other prominent voices in our discipline. For instance, Brookfield has cited Baptiste's (2000) article in many of his publications, including five books (Brookfield, 2004, 2015, 2017; Brookfield & Holst, 2010; Preskill & Brookfield, 2008), which in turn have been cited over 14,000 times as of the writing of this article. We also see similarities between Baptiste's theory and the writings of Newman (e.g., 1994), who is another prominent adult education scholar. (Significantly, two of Newman's books and four of Brookfield's books referenced here won the Cyril Houle Award for Outstanding Literature in Adult Education.) These are highly visible (or rather, audible) mouthpieces of the field.

Baptiste blames the "liberal humanist hegemony" in adult education for disempowering the potential fighter of injustice, and in doing so, also for contributing to an unjust world. He labels as "misguided foes" Freire, Mezirow, and other influential scholars because they assume "that one could sufficiently stem the tides of violence and injustices […] simply by appealing to their sense of reason and personal integrity" (Baptiste, 2000, p. 2). These scholars are guilty of "boiling down" the socially crucial tasks of adult education to such ineffective practices as "nurturing systemic thinkers and actors, […] changing learners' meaning schemes and/or perspectives […] and the developing of critical consciousness" (p. 8).

Baptiste (2000) argues that *coercive restraint*, or to "forcibly change a person's behavior" (p. 3) is legitimate when it is used against the perpetrators of social injustice, and he names three methods of pedagogical coercive restraint: imposition, coercion, and violence. (The latter he suggests only to curb other violence and does not apply to pedagogical practice.) Imposition, Baptiste (2008) argues, is to insert or remove elements into the mental or physical space. Therefore, teachers introducing new concepts to their class would be imposing on students. This broad definition allows for the argument that since all teaching involves the introduction of new concepts, all education contains elements of imposition, and therefore imposition as such is justifiable (pp. 19–20).

Coercion, per Baptiste, is a special form of imposition, that which is unsolicited, and which uses "physical or moral force to compel to act or assent" (2008, p. 14). Again, a broad definition allows for conflation of very different teaching phenomena. Examples cited are "unwelcomed educational assignments" (2008, p. 9) and that of a professor insisting that students perform a writing assignment according to the instructions given (2000, p.12). And as before, the argument is that since all teaching involves instructions for assignments and the insistence that they are followed, then coercion as such is justifiable.

In justifying imposition and coercion, Baptiste (2008) proposes an analogy that we find all too representative of our concerns: "When my mother forced me to eat broccoli, she did not restrict my nutritional choices; she expanded them" (p. 9). The argument is that the adult learner's experience is expanded by educators forcing their perspectives on students, even if through manipulation, intimidation, and (credible) force (Baptiste, 2000, p. 11).

Variations on the Theme: Coercion as a Corrective to Hegemony

Brookfield and Holst (2010) echo Baptiste's philosophy. In their case, the argument is that their preferred economic and political philosophy (democratic socialism) will never "stand a chance" with many learners—due to deeply engrained ideological manipulation against it—and therefore "in the interests of fairness, it will be necessary to force people to pay attention to a socialist agenda" (pp. 13–14). This manifests in the instructor forbidding perspectives contrary to her own to be voiced, until students are freed from their "false consciousness" by learning about democratic socialism (i.e., "the full range of alternatives" [p. 117]), and only then would "authentically democratic" pedagogies begin (p. 117).

    We see in practices such as this an educator assuming the mantel of parent, consistent with Baptiste's broccoli analogy, toward untaught, backward-thinking adults, forcing the light of Truth upon them (regarding economic systems, social structures, solutions to complex problems, and presumably anything else the educator *knows*), since given their own free will, these adults will simply continue believing the hegemonic myths that are causing so much harm in the world. We can discern no way that such a "highly directive" (p. 59) approach to education can possibly "create true democracy" (p. 58) by coercing learners into accepting the dogma of a particular ideology.

Variations on the Theme: Defining Enemies

Consider as well Newman's (1994) complaints about scholarship and his suggested role for adult educators, which were precursors to Baptiste's theory. For Newman, most critical or radical theories of education lack spirit, vitality, and force because they call for mutuality, personal introspection, and other seemingly soft measures. Newman advocates for directly confronting the individuals and groups who are directly responsible for oppression, exploitation, and injustice (a call to action we find admirable)—but doing so without calling into question our own perspectives or any complexities and ambiguities of the situation. For, if we give "a fair hearing, adding a little balance, we are domesticated and lost" (p. 184).

    We read in Newman's complaints the same frustration that Baptiste later echoes: the world is full of injustice, and nothing we have been doing is fixing it!! And, similar to Baptiste, Newman abandons giving "a fair hearing" to those with whom we disagree, or "adding a little balance" to one's own position. Instead, there is a clean bifurcation between good (one's own side) and evil (the opposition). Alongside this dangerous simplification of the world is a diehard resolution that one's own interpretation of the world, its evils, and the causes thereof and solutions thereto are correct. From this perspective, one does not need to listen to the other side, nor to help people see the world in all (or, at least, more) of its complexity and ambiguity. Instead, one should simply enact their own vision for what is good and right.

    We share many of the frustrations and aspirations of Baptiste, Brookfield, Holst, and Newman. Indeed, we are admirers of all four of them as scholars.

However, we are concerned about the view of the educator, as evinced in some of their writings, as one who knows exactly how adult students are deficient in their ways of thinking and being in the world and, lacking respect for those learners as legitimate knowledge producers, endeavors to mold them according to the educator's preconceived vision. Holding an aspirational vision is fine, likely inevitable, but unilaterally deciding how your adult students need to change is ethically problematic.

Ethics in Adult Education Literature

The discussion of ethics in the field of adult education is nothing new. (For an overview of the North American literature, see Sork, 2009; for the German discussion, see Schwendemann, 2018, pp. 89–103.) This literature is too large to present adequately here, but some representative and summarizing pieces can serve to frame our discussion.

Conflicting Ethical Principles

Writing from the German context, Fuhr (2003) discusses ethics by exploring the tension surrounding paternalism and unintentional coercion toward adult learners, making arguments similar to, if not as extreme as, Baptiste's. Indirect coercion, he argues, is practically unavoidable in adult education. "We refer to our professional competence, advise participants accordingly or implement our didactic plans without the participants immediately noticing that the course is taking a path that they do not like" (p. 377, translation ours). Fuhr continues that adult education which understands its mission to improve our societies cannot act but paternalistically, such as when adult education was striving to be the "motor" of democratization in the post-World War I (WWI) Weimar Republic, of the de-nazification of the German population after WWII, and of the emancipation in the 1970s.

> We should not ask whether paternalistic attempts at influencing are fundamentally forbidden, permitted or required. We are confronted with not just one, but several ethical and legal principles to which we should align our actions. One of these principles is that of the private autonomy of the adult, another one is that our actions should serve their well-being. Both principles can conflict with each other. We should therefore look for criteria that can be used to judge under which concrete conditions paternalism towards adults is justified and under which it is not. (Fuhr, 2003, p. 387, translation ours)

Fuhr argues that paternalistic interventions are justified in three cases: (1) when a substantially irrational decision of person A has serious negative consequences for A; (2) when they ultimately result in increased autonomy (which we struggle to see as possible and explore it in more detail below); and (3) when learners are not capable of recognizing or justifying their own interests (2003, p. 388). This is in

line with both Baptiste and Brookfield and Holst, as in Baptiste's analogy of a mother forcing her son to eat broccoli, and Brookfield and Holst's (2010) claim that an anti-socialist hegemony would preclude students from giving democratic socialism an honest chance, thereby justifying the forcing of a socialist perspective onto students. It is important to note, however, that Fuhr is concerned about the wellbeing of the individual learner, from which he derives his justification for paternalism. In contrast, Baptiste and Brookfield and Holst argue that societal interests, as they define them, are reason enough for a paternalistic approach.

Using the broccoli analogy, we would argue that presenting learners with new concepts and providing insights or arguments for and against various perspectives is more akin to *offering* broccoli and justifying why it is good to eat. *Forcing* broccoli to be eaten is something different altogether. We would point out that, besides the obvious patronizing attitude this analogy conveys towards adult learners, the practices it would represent are still ineffective. To force a person to eat broccoli does not ensure that the person will continue to do it after they have an opportunity to make their own choices. It can have quite the opposite reaction: they can develop resentments toward the eating of broccoli. But regardless, one thing will remain important: the person's autonomy was undermined. The person felt the exercise of power; her will did not play a role. This undermining of autonomy may be permissible at the family dinner table, but it is much less so in an adult learning setting. If we do not consider an adult as a person entitled to autonomy, then what is the alternative—to reify a person to clay, an inanimate material which educators mold to their own will?

Arguments Against Coercion

This issue has already been debated in the German adult education context based on the "Beutelsbach Consensus" (Schiele & Schneider, 1977). Based initially on discussions about appropriate civic education for children, it was later applied to adult education. The Beutelsbach Consensus has three principles for civic education. First is *Überwältigungsverbot*, or the prohibition against overwhelming the student. Educators should enable students to develop their own views rather than using their position to force their views onto students. Second is *Kontroversitätsgebot*, treating controversial topics as controversial. Without necessarily being neutral, the educator should nevertheless present the differing perspectives on controversial issues so that students can form their own perspectives. Third is *Lernerorientierung*, or giving weight to the personal interests of the students. Educators should enable students to analyze society, and their own position in it, and to actively participate in civic processes (Kloubert, 2019).

Recently, Nohl (2022) discusses the difference between nondirective education (*Bildung*) and directive education (*Erziehung*) to examine mass education practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and asks the question "whether it is legitimate to rely on directive mass education in a democracy at all" (p. 183)—even in the extreme situation of a pandemic. Nohl defines directive education as that "in favour of specific norms and orientations that border on inculcation and imposition"

(p. 167) and considers it ethically questionable when it is "based on an asymmetrical relationship between the educators and the educated … precisely because an imposition of orientation ultimately threatens to curtail the autonomy of adults" (p. 184).

Similarly, in the North American literature, Siegel (2000) recommends 10 principles as the basis of a universal code of ethics for adult education, three of which are particularly relevant here:

- (#2) Respect the ethno-socio-cultural heritage, special circumstances, and dignity as human beings of all adult learners;
- (#5) Respect … the need of each learner for honesty, understanding, and fairness; should respect the real or perceived disparity in position between educator and learner; and should respect the right of learners to participate in any solutions designed to meet their needs;
- (#9) Assist in empowering learners to participate actively and effectively to improve the general welfare of their immediate and global communities and to promote the concepts of a just and equitable society. (summarized by Sork, 2009, pp. 24–25)

Educational practices typified in Baptiste's theory of coercive restraint stand opposed to all three of these principles. Respecting the heritage of all learners (#2) includes those learners whom the educator believes are too *mainstream*, too influenced by the hegemony of their culture, as if the culture the educator is promoting would somehow be free of hegemony; there is a normative element in any conception of radical or transformative education. The principle of "assist(ing) learners to participate actively and effectively to improve" the world (#9), through mutual examination and learning is in contrast with an educator *forcing* their *Truth* onto adult learners. Respecting the need for honesty, understanding, and fairness (#5) precludes all the practices Baptiste justifies.

Arguments Against Manipulation

Hamm (1989) categorizes methods of pedagogical work into three types: legitimate practices, bad teaching, and unethical methods. Legitimate practices include the manner of teaching that enables students to understand and support or refute the allegations and evidence asserted, and to discover incongruities through reflection. In turn, it would be illegitimate if the teacher does not present controversial topics as such; unethical methods include the suppression of counter-evidence, the selective use of evidence, and the disregard of criticism. These methods are a form of manipulation; they promote indoctrination rather than education, as they ignore and undermine the learner's rational and moral ability to act.

Similarly, Noggle (1996) writing from the discipline of philosophy, argues that manipulative action represents an affront to humans as rational and moral beings and is in its nature inhuman.

Acting manipulatively toward someone, then, is an affront to her as a rational and moral being; for it is an attempt to thwart her moral and rational agency, which has as its goal the correct adjustment of her psychological levers. To attempt to thwart the goals someone has qua rational moral agent is to fail to respect her rational moral agency. And since a person's rational moral agency is crucial to her personhood, to fail to respect it is to degrade her; it is to treat her as less than a person. And for that reason it is wrong. (Noggle, 1996, p. 52)

Ethics in the Transformative Learning Literature

Specifically addressing ethics of transformative learning, Baumgartner (2001), Smith and Kempster (2019), and Hoggan et al. (2017) make passing reference and cautionary remarks problematizing the notion of transformation as always and necessarily a *good thing*; Ettling (2012) explores the tension between adult education seeking to address societal changes and the danger of imposing one's own thoughts onto learners; Yacek (2020) points to possible ethical pitfalls emanating from the impossibility of knowing the results and ramifications of transformative learning. However, in all these cases, although we find the particular ethical concerns worthy of consideration, their selection seems to be somewhat idiosyncratic because they do not flow from a systematic ethical framework, which is what we seek to develop.

Consequentialist and Deontological Approaches to Ethics

Consequentialist ethics justifies actions based on their results, whereas deontological ethics justifies actions based on their consistency with underlying principles and values. Baptiste's argument is a consequentialist one: if the pedagogical process leads to *good* consequences, then it can be justified (i.e., the ends justify the means). Baptiste (2008) states it explicitly: "The privileging of intentions over concrete consequences is philosophically flawed" (p. 21). We disagree.

With Yacek (2020) we argue that educators should be wary of prescribing a specific transformation because there is no way to know what the outcomes will be. For one thing, the desired transformation may be left unfinished, with undesirable consequences for the learner caught in a liminal state. Even a completed transformation (if such a thing is even possible) may not necessarily be positive for the learner. And, even if one's vision is laudable, it is impossible to guarantee that one's educational actions will lead to the desired outcomes, especially when the pedagogies employed contradict the supposed objectives. A consequentialist ethics can only be justified in hindsight because it is impossible to know in advance what the consequences of actions will be.

Perhaps one might try to condone a consequentialist approach to ethical practice if they could know for certain that their actions would inevitably accomplish their desired ends. However, we fail to see how one can justify their vision of the world as so objectively better than all other potential visions, that it justifies means such as intimidation, manipulation, and (credible) force. Indeed, we can see in the examples chosen for this text (Baptiste, Newman, Brookfield and Holst) that even though they share a common

niche (i.e., forms of radical or transformative education), they each promote distinct educational visions, which may or may not be mutually exclusive but that definitely represent different prescriptions for learners' worldviews, epistemologies, and ontologies. Guided by an ethic of "the ends justify the means," it would indeed be a troublesome world when even those in the same camp are fighting ruthlessly, abiding by no ethical principles except anything they perceive will further their own visions. Thus, we find it not only patronizing but also harmful for educators to claim that they have the right to choose a vision of the world and unilaterally enact that vision with their learners.

Paradoxes With Which We Must Reckon

This discussion is not new in the field of education. Kant (1803/1983) famously formulated a paradox of the educational situation, asking how we can possibly cultivate freedom using constraint or force (p. 701). Education, he argued, should lead to freedom and maturity (*Mündigkeit*), but it often uses methods of coercion. This is especially true in the education of children, where learning includes strong asymmetries between adult teachers and child learners; a child running into a busy street will be forced by an adult to stop. In Kant's eyes, the child is a *deficient* being that can only develop her ability to act autonomously with the help of education.

Adult education, however, is different because of the moral and legal autonomy of adults. There is a seeming educational paradox, where autonomy is both a precondition of adult learners and yet also an educational goal. Autonomy as a precondition does not mean that adults have developed the necessary capacities to think and act fully autonomously (including being devoid of false consciousness, if that is even ever completely possible); rather, it means that they are entitled to be treated as autonomous agents of their own lives and as co-shapers of their social worlds, not to be coerced, manipulated, or otherwise (credibly) forced into thinking or acting according to someone else's design. Therefore, adult education is called upon to grant them that respect and at the same time to foster, encourage, and help them further develop autonomous thinking and acting as a goal of education.

We cannot educate for autonomous thinking and acting while using methods opposed to them; we cannot "empower" by exercising power over adult learners; we cannot critically reflect on power, as Brookfield and Holst (2010) demand adult educators do for a better world, and at the same time use our "power to force students to learn" democratic socialism as the (only acceptable) alternative to the existing order (p. 117). Taylor (2011) pointed to this contradiction in his review of their book, characterizing Brookfield and Holst's educator as "a persuader who ironically is encouraged to use his or her authority and power to indoctrinate learners about a critical theory" (p. 89).

Methods Versus Content

One could argue that *not* engaging in radical or transformative education may yield undesirable results, when the status quo is riddled with human suffering and

injustice, and the hegemony of the current culture precludes any real change. In light of the limiting power of hegemony, Baptiste (2008) pointed to the concept of repressive tolerance as introduced by Marcuse: "the democratic argument implies a necessary condition, namely that people must be capable of deliberating and choosing on the basis of knowledge, that they must have access to authentic information, and that, on this basis, their evaluation must be the result of autonomous thought" (Marcuse, as quoted by Baptiste, 2008, p. 20). We wholeheartedly agree with Marcuse that adult education should help and encourage people to develop the capacities necessary for deliberation, participation, critical thinking, and autonomous decision making. We question, however, how this is even remotely possible through methods such as coercion and manipulation. Although the development of *free critical thinkers* does not necessarily guarantee that people will be better or more just, the cultivation of indoctrinated thinkers surely diminishes the capacities needed for democracy. Indoctrination promotes an "out of the frying pan into the fire" scenario, where, at best, current hegemonies are simply replaced with new ones.

We may think that we are teaching students how to enact a more just world or to counter dominant hegemonies, but if our pedagogies are authoritarian or coercive, then we are conditioning them to be passive to authority—to *our* authority. The teaching *methods* we employ can be more influential than the *content* we teach. We certainly would not be teaching the skills and attitudes necessary to participate in a democracy in a pluralistic world, where one recognizes that differences in values, interests, and perspectives always exist, and that for democracy to function, practices such as deliberation, perspective-taking, and compromise (rather than coercion) must be the primary social, and therefore also pedagogical, practices.

We emphasize therefore the crucial importance of including a deontological (as opposed to only a consequentialist) ethics, which measures the ethical appropriateness of an action according to its consistency with underlying principles and values. If adult education is to support democracy, then it must accept the principles of democracy as valuable in themselves. We cannot claim to support democracy and at the same time ignore democratic principles.

We do not make this argument simply because being consistent with our principles allows us to sleep better—or more smugly—at night. Of course we need to consider the consequences of our pedagogical actions. We are not saying that using democratically principled pedagogies will automatically and inevitably mean that learners "will do better once they become free, critical thinkers" (Baptiste, 2008, p. 19). Rather, we are saying that coercion does not promote free and critical thinkers; rather, it promotes disciples. The world has many ills and evils, and adult education is not going to fix them all by itself. However, it can contribute to a more just world by preparing adults with the capacities necessary to engage with others across difference, to question the status quo, argue against inequities, and work with people (even those with whom they disagree) to address complex problems. Creating disciples, formed by coerced assent to a given vision or ideology, does not promote these capacities.

The Foundation for an Ethics of Adult Education

What should, then, an ethics of adult education be based on? Our answer is twofold: that adult education should support democracy and should be based on a commitment to human dignity.

Adult Education in Support of Democracy

We begin by foregrounding the complexity and plurality of the world, and the difficulty of enacting and maintaining democracy. Democracy is neither inevitable, naturally occurring, nor guaranteed to last; it is a human-made construct that, when it has been implemented, was hard won and under constant threat of conversion back to tyranny (which we can currently see all over the world). Democratic social and political arrangements have yet to be perfected and are often not the most efficient system for making fast and effective decisions. Democracy's intention, however, is none of these things, but rather to be a more principled and qualitatively better form of living together.

By its very nature, democracy "is the most cognitively demanding form of living together, presupposing many human capacities (e.g., critical decision-making) and social processes (e.g., public deliberation)" (Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2023, p. 6), which is why adult education has long been positioned as its necessary companion. Adult education, however, can be used to serve many purposes. Indeed, the USSR had a robust and extensive adult education system, which we would argue worked against the purposes of democracy, and in which all citizens were expected to engage in the lifelong pursuit of learning to become the perfect "socialist personality" (Kloubert, 2014). Our ethical framework is based, however, on the foundation that adult education should explicitly serve and support democracy (Boggs, 1991). This does not mean that all adult education programs should be directed at civic learning, but rather that in serving the many and varied needs for adult learning (whether that is inter alia workplace learning, self-improvement, or learning for civic engagement and social change), the field of adult education should always support rather than undermine the capacities of learners to participate in democracy.

Democracy is not simply a form of government, but an overarching form of living together, where citizens engage individually and collectively in civic actions, and in so doing, participate as co-creators rather than spectators of their worlds (Dewey, 1916). Citizens take part in democratic procedures (e.g., voting), as well as day-to-day practices of living, communicating, and working with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. At a minimum, citizens need the capacity to think (critically), to choose reasonably between options, to give arguments for their positions and to listen to the arguments of others. The adult, "coerced" into a specific worldview, might be committed to principles of fairness, equity, and justice, but we have strong doubts the citizens thus produced would be committed to and equipped for democracy as procedure and practice, and if they were, it would be despite rather than because of their coercive educational experience. Thus, even a consequentialist ethics would be

opposed to such practices. The hoped-for results of coerced mindsets might be desirable in the eyes of the educator (because, for instance, they are expected to lead to a prioritization of equity), but the gaining of those mindsets through coercion will concomitantly develop habits of thinking that undermine democratic participation.

In a diverse and pluralistic world, we are confronted with myriad different, often conflicting, values, perspectives, priorities, assumptions, histories, and narratives. To aspire for freedom within this plurality means that there will always be disagreement over issues both big and small. With the ubiquity of communicative technologies, we are exposed to immense amounts of information and opinions that we need to make sense of, order, evaluate, and judge. If effective democratic participation in such a situation was to ever be possible, it would involve critical thinking toward all positions (including one's own) and the creative and critical effort of developing more complex understandings based on our openness to diverse perspectives, along with a willingness to support specific positions on individual issues while simultaneously committing to the general principles and practices of democracy, meaning that our own perspectives and wishes will not always, or even generally, be what the overall democratic processes yield. Adult education in the service of democracy must be constantly vigilant in promoting the skills, habits, and dispositions toward these difficult processes.

Adult Education in Support of Human Dignity

A second foundation of adult education is the principle of human dignity, which, broadly defined, means that we treat all individual human beings as an end in themselves rather than an instrument or means of someone else or even of a supposed higher cause.

Human Dignity and Autonomy. In a legal sense, this means that respecting human dignity requires that one respect each individual's autonomy, that is, the possibility of determining one's own life path and living as one wishes (Daly & May, 2018). Endeavoring to mold people according to a specific image of what we would have them be, without explicit foreknowledge and consent by the learner, along with legitimate possibilities not to participate, is an affront to learners' right to autonomy. Even with such consent, we find problematic any adult education practice that seeks to mold rather than to promote agency, co-creation, and the development of learners' capacities for determining their own life path. It is hardly justifiable to sacrifice the learner's current dignity and right to autonomy on the grounds of pursuing a *better future* as defined by somebody else.

Historically, adult education literature has emphasized the necessity of promoting capacities for democracy and respecting autonomy, but this notion has come under attack from postmodern and similar critiques, leading to a current "crisis of epistemology" with serious implications for the functioning of democracy (Hoggan-Kloubert & Hoggan, 2023). These critiques foreground structure over individual agency, even going so far as declaring that the "subject is dead" (Baudrillard, 1987, p. 35). In so

doing, they characterize humans as primarily objects in a structure and downplay their possibilities as subjects and co-creators. In our view, the arguments of Baptiste and others that undermine learner autonomy are consistent with the perspectives of post-modernists such as Baudrillard—and suffer from the same problem: they foreground structure and insist that agency plays too little a role in human affairs. Our counter is: What would be the alternative of respecting autonomy? Shall we mold people into *our* vision of what they should be? What would be the result: a person accustomed to being coerced, governed, shaped by somebody else's will? It is the value of human dignity, with its attendant requirement of respect for autonomy, that prohibits the treating of individuals as moldable objects, but rather insists on treating them as thinking and acting subjects, who are entitled to and (potentially) capable of actively co-shaping the world.

Ideally, autonomy entails the element of reflection and thoughtful dealing with the world, including systems of oppression and hegemony. For Adorno (1971), who asked himself after the second world war what "education after Auschwitz" would be about, its ultimate goal is preventing another Auschwitz by fostering and developing "a society of mature/autonomous (*mündig*) people" (p. 107). If radical adult education wants to contribute to the fight against injustice, how then could it ever consider coercion as a means? How can critical reflection be learned and habituated through coercion?

Human Dignity and Pluralism. If we aspire to live in a free and also pluralistic society, we must be comfortable living with difference. Therefore, a second component of human dignity relevant for democracy is a recognition of pluralism and the right of every human being to think differently. We draw on Isaiah Berlin's concept of value pluralism, which Zacharas (2013) conveyed pithily: "I hold that certain values … should be given priority, at the cost of others. I acknowledge that others may disagree, and they are not irrational for doing so … because human values really are plural and incommensurable" (p. 95). Of course, we need parameters delineating values that are unacceptable, such as those that do not recognize the dignity of all humans, but even within those parameters there is much room for difference, and the varying values will lead to multiple visions of the ideal world and therefore for educational objectives. It would be hubris indeed to assume the inevitable Truth of one's vision for the world, its ailments, and the *magic bullet* that will solve the world's problems if only everyone shared that perspective. Respecting human dignity, especially the components of autonomy and value pluralism, in education forbids the treatment of learners as if they are the mere means to one's own vision, however worthy that vision seems to be. [See the discussion between Michelson (2019) and Hoggan and Kloubert (2020).]

A Typology of Pedagogical Design

The design of transformative, and we would argue also radical, education can be understood according to a three-part typology (Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020), which is useful in making applications of this ethical framework.

Prescriptive

The first approach is *prescriptive*, which is how we understand the stance of Baptiste, Newman, Brookfield, and Holst, as described above. In this approach, the educator decides exactly how learners need to change and endeavors to instigate a transformation accordingly. The learner's job is to adapt to the myriad epistemological, ontological, behavioral, and other types of change envisioned by the educator.

A prescriptive approach is not ethically wrong, per se. Considerations of learners' consent should be taken into account (e.g., foreknowledge of and desire for intended outcomes, ability to withdraw or not to assimilate) (Yacek, 2020). For instance, a prescriptive educational program might promise potential participants that it will lead them on a journey of transformation toward a specific goal, and potential participants who desire to experience that type of learning and change and can choose without repercussions whether or not to participate. Such a prescriptive program would not necessarily be unethical. However, when, for instance, students are enrolled in an educational program, and an educator in that program decides that learners must change in some fundamental ways in order to assimilate to her unilateral vision of how they need to be, especially in ways not strictly necessary for the program's overall educational objectives, then we find that to be a problem.

This point deserves further elucidation. According to our framework, an educator may justly try to get students in a nursing class to develop epistemologies, ontologies, and behaviors expected of a nurse, which would be important for students to be successful in their future careers. At the same time, however, we would consider it unethical for the educator to try to coerce nursing students to become vegan, convert to her religion, or adopt her political stance. This does not mean that the educator should not espouse or defend her positions on these issues when relevant. It may be, for instance, that she discerns some fundamental flaws and inequities in the healthcare system and feels it incumbent upon her to address those flaws in her teaching. According to our framework, there are three relevant considerations. Does her teaching support, or at least not undermine, democratic capabilities? Does it respect learner autonomy? Does it allow for plurality? If the educational process is designed to coerce learners to change in deep, fundamental ways to match her unilateral vision of an equitable healthcare system, then the answer to these questions would be negative, and therefore we would consider her pedagogies unethical.

Process Oriented

A second approach to educational design is "process-oriented" (Hoggan & Kloubert, 2020). In this approach, educators select teaching and learning processes that by their very design exemplify, and therefore teach, their values and principles—for instance: critical thinking, creative thinking, open-mindedness, perspective taking, or dialogue. Inevitably, the educator promotes particular views and works from a given value position, and if students express opposing or differing views, or espouse a different value system (assuming the espoused values are within the acceptable frame of human dignity), then a process-oriented approach engages with those views and values rather than disallowing them.

This is exactly the approach that Mezirow advocated for in his theory of perspective transformation. For him, neither the educator nor anyone else possessed the whole Truth. Therefore, for Mezirow, the educational process should be one of collaborative striving for better understanding, including activities such as critical dialogue, self-reflection, perspective taking, and mutual assessment of evidence (2000, pp. 10–13). Of course, it is impossible to disentangle the teaching and learning processes we use and our goals for learning outcomes, especially if, as we argue, the processes we follow have the seeds of learning outcomes embedded in them. The essential difference between a prescriptive and a process-oriented approach is between a lack of alternatives (because the educator already knows the Truth) and an ever-present willingness to explore possibilities, search for alternatives, defend one's views and values, and grant others a respectful consideration of their own.

Returning to the nursing example, according to our framework, the educator could and should address the flaws in the healthcare system with students. However, using a process-oriented approach, she would do so by engaging in an exploration of the options and opportunities available to the students to address those flaws, challenge the system, and thereby influence and co-shape their social world. Rather than seeking to impose her specific perspective or endeavoring to mold them according to her image of what they should be, the focus would be on facilitating the acquisition of skills and habits related to civic participation: analyzing complex problems in their complexity, understanding multiple perspectives on contentious issues, and promoting change through organizing and political efforts.

We find a process-oriented approach much more ethically sound than a prescriptive one. Responses and solutions to societally important questions can arise from people with diverse experiences and conflicting interests, and the use of deliberative, dialogical processes in classrooms not only promotes learning regarding those important questions, but through the process itself helps learners develop capacities necessary for effective functioning in a democratic way of life—and honors their dignity as humans by respecting their autonomy.

Adaptive

A third approach to educational design is *adaptive*, meaning that educators recognize when learners are likely in the midst of transformation (or, at least, facing *transformational learning challenges*). In this approach, the educator's role is to provide targeted support to learners. For instance, historically underserved students (first generation, low income, minoritized) in higher education often face *transformational learning challenges*, such as developing a sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, and an identity as a college student (Hoggan & Browning, 2019). These extra-curricular learning challenges are arguably a leading reason for persistent disparities in completion rates between these students and their historically served classmates. When educators recognize that students are experiencing these challenges and explicitly support students in working through them, that is what we call an adaptive approach to transformative education.

We hasten to note that although an adaptive approach aligns more easily with our ethical framework than a prescriptive approach does, it is not immune to ethical pitfalls. In this situation, learners are often vulnerable and therefore acutely susceptible to promises of orientation. This is often how extremist groups seek new adherents: finding people in vulnerable situations and offering social, emotional, and cognitive stability, while endeavoring to shape them into the predefined ideology (Da Silva et al., 2022). We would consider this a form of manipulation and therefore against our criterion of respecting learner autonomy. The extent to which an adaptive approach would align with or contradict our ethics would be based on the three considerations of democratic capabilities, autonomy, and plurality.

Concluding Thoughts

Education in support of democracy is not necessarily, nor ideally, passive or toothless. As Biesta argues, we as educators *should* intervene and destabilize an individual's subjective confidence, but the method for this is by asking difficult questions, the most central of which is: "What do you think about it?" (2006, p. 150). This question "summon(s) us to respond responsively and responsibly to otherness and difference in our own, unique ways" (p. ix). Biesta advocates for helping learners "find their own unique, responsive, and responsible voice" (p. 115), and thereby treat education for democracy as education *through* democracy (p. 137). For us, this represents a deontological ethical approach to education.

For adult education to be dedicated to the furthering of democracy and human dignity does not eliminate problems related to imposition, coercion, paternalism, and so forth. Placing the goals of adult education exclusively at the discretion of the individual learner is likely untenable, as the goals of a democratic education may lie outside what a particular individual desires for her learning. Nevertheless, these are tensions that need to be navigated, striving always to provide an education that supports the capacities necessary for effective participation in a society striving for freedom, equity, and democracy.

One could argue that the societal status quo may already be undermining democracy and human dignity, and certainly such undermining in education does not compare with the real harms experienced by the profound injustices in the world. However, we must keep in mind that our responses to the evils and suffering in the world will promote either the making of a better world or the simple supplanting of one form of tyranny with another. We indeed need radical and transformative education, but its radical nature needs to be in its commitment to the ideals to which we ascribe: democracy, epistemic humility, respect for human dignity including autonomy, and living with plurality; and its transformative nature needs to lie in its promotion of processes such as critical thinking, creative thinking, open-mindedness, perspective taking, and dialogue that provide adults with access to skills and capacities that they can choose to employ in their daily lives with the potential for transformative outcomes.

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