Abstract

The link between Confucian humanism and Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity is explicit. While Confucian humanism emphasizes inner experience, the Mezirow’s theory has increasingly developed to integrate inner reflection expressed through, transformed perspectives, decision and action. To appreciate the basis of both schools of theory, this article presents a discussion of these two originating theorists.

As an introductory thought the following quotations illustrate how Confucius’ thought has long been valued and aspired to in the pursuit of reflection and wisdom. Rather than the routine or inattentive action that tends to dominate our lives in the 21st century, this widespread 2000 year-old Eastern philosophy and tradition has been synonymous with questioning the meanings and assumptions of one’s surroundings and values.

“Study without thought is labor lost; thought without study is perilous.”
“By nature men are nearly alike, but through experience they grow wide apart.”
“Those who are born wise are the highest type of men; those who become wise through learning come next; those who are dull-witted and yet strive to learn come after that. Those who are dull-witted and yet make no effort to learn are the lowest type of men” (as cited in Chai & Chai, 1965, pp. 44-45). Confucius or Kong Fuzi (551-479 BC)

In addition to advancing our understanding of transformative learning and an integrated model of reflective thought, we hope this article will stir further international research in reflective learning and the intersections of Eastern philosophies with Western traditions and philosophies. Worldwide there are many rich traditions; if our understanding of teaching and learning can build upon our understanding with one another, we can open new doors for appreciation, insight, and inquiry.

Introduction

There has been increasing interest in the theory of reflectivity as it is known in Europe, or transformative learning, as it is more commonly referred to in the United States in the field of adult education since Mezirow (1978) proposed it based on his research and his interpretation of Habermasian critical theory. Over the years many articles, books (Cranton, 1994; King, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997; Mezirow, 2000), journals and even conferences (for example, The International Transformative Learning Conference 1998-2005) have examined, critiqued, and further developed this theory. These research endeavors, publications and venues have emerged mostly within the field of adult education in order to provide a forum for detailed analysis of this prevalent theory and to demonstrate how this theory has affected the course of adult learning thought (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999)

However, at the same time there is some concern that transformative learning has focused too much on a rational perspective (Dirkx, 1997), a western perspective (King, 2005), and too narrowly within the formal field of adult education alone (King, 2004). Indeed, the discussion in Canada (O’Sullivan, 1999; O’Sullivan, Morrell & O’Connor, 2002) and Europe (Jarvis, 1987) has often focused on different issues within transformative learning than in the United States.

It is with a greater sense of our global connections and community, the need and urgency for multicultural perspectives, the venue of different academic disciplines, and varied philosophical foundations in our social radical pedagogies that we present this article and model to consider the similarities and differences among and between the Mezirow’s original theory of transformative learning and the long-standing philosophy of Confucius.

In fact in Europe, adult theorists introduced Mezirow’s work as “the theory of reflectivity” (Jarvis, 1987) as this was the focal point of the work in its early years that distinguished it from the contemporaries of the Behaviorists. It is from this perspective that one of us, Wang, schooled and familiar with Eastern philosophical traditions was introduced to Mezirow’s work and that together we approached this dialogue- on a potentially vibrant common ground of reflectivity. Both schools of thought, Confucius’ and Mezirow’s reflection, emphasize the process by which adults seek inner critical reflection to foster and development. In both approaches, the process in turn leads to the possibility of creating new knowledge via critical reflection. While many potential linkages stand to be explored among these two theories, and very different perspectives and pathways are evident.
While the means of creating and fostering this critical reflection differ based on the traditions (Western practice vs. Confucius), one can see some similarities from the start. Despite its popularity, we will demonstrate what few scholars realize - that Mezirow's theory of reflectivity may be said in many ways to have originated in the seminal Confucian humanism. While humanism is discussed in relation to the theory of reflectivity, and transformative learning, the chief contributor of humanism, Confucius seems to have been forgotten by Western scholars. This is not an uncommon occurrence as it is all too uncommon to link Eastern and Western literature, thought and philosophy. As a social science, educational theory is built upon the foundation of philosophical thought and Western traditions replicates and further distances the schism from any Eastern traditions because they become even further buried beneath the different traditions and "orthodoxies."

To better understand Mezirow's theory, Confucius needs to be brought to light. Confucius's humanistic assertions regarding learning and reflection have inspired generations of teachers and learners, while the theory of transformative learning is relatively new.

The purpose of this article is neither to solely study Confucian concepts in a contemporary perspective nor to present an analysis of Mezirow's critical reflection within transformative learning. It is rather an attempt to examine Mezirow's evolving theory of reflectivity by contrasting it with what was already advanced by Confucius twenty-five centuries ago in China and benefit from that body of knowledge as we bridge these two schools of thought. Indeed rather than definitive answers, this article poses many postulates and questions. We probe connections and possibilities. In addition to advancing our understanding of transformative learning, we hope this article will stir further international research in reflective learning and transformative learning specifically and the intersections of Eastern philosophies and traditions with Western traditions, philosophies and educational theories more broadly. We aspire that more colleagues will work to intersect different multicultural perspectives and benefit from juxtaposing them. We have many rich traditions within our world, if our understanding of teaching and learning can build and multiply upon our understanding with one another, we can open new doors for understanding and inquiry.

**Theoretical Framework**

As we consider the theoretical framework of this proposal, we were reminded of some basic understandings and comparisons between human and animal learning. While animals learn via reflexes and behavior modification; humans also learn through reflection. Specifically, adult learners are faced with learning problems and these learning problems perplex and challenge the mind so that it makes belief uncertain (Dewey, 1933, p. 13). To Dewey, it is this perplexity that leads to reflective thinking, and in Western traditions of adult learning it has been promoted by Schon and also Freire in the 1970s (Argyris & Schon 1974; Freire, 1970, 1973; Schon, 1983) and Mezirow in the late 1970’s through the 1990’s (Mezirow, 1978, 1990, 1991, 1997, 2000).

In comparison, in the traditions of China, humanistic thought dates back twenty-five centuries to Confucius (Elias & Merriam, 1995). At that time humanism emerged in China in the form of self-criticism, characterized by a metaphor in this tradition as "inner digging and drilling" (like that of a well) that necessarily leads to an awareness of the self not as a mental construct, but as an experienced reality. To Confucius, learning could not occur without silent reflection (Confucius, 500BCEc).

In the late 20th century, Mezirow developed three types of reflection and seven levels of reflectivity, taking into consideration both Confucius' inner experience and external situation. While a number of important unacknowledged theoretical regimes do exist which make much use of the concept of reflexivity as a means for enhancing self-understanding such as Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance and Kuhn's (1996) revolutionary paradigm shifts, this article intends to merge two prominent intellectual traditions by exclusively focusing on Confucius and Mezirow. A detailed analysis of Confucian humanism and Mezirow's theory of reflectivity may shed more light on the much-debated issue of how adults learn. Further, this analysis may equip adult educators with necessary knowledge and skills to better help adult learners learn in this knowledge society and information age.

**Analysis**

This manuscript provides a comparison of the literature related to Confucian humanism and Mezirow's theory of reflectivity through a careful review and analysis of similarities and differences. These literatures represent major traditions of thought and can provide provocative insight and stir additional inquiry regarding these separate yet today necessarily intersecting schools of thought and practice. By understanding this social phenomenon through these literatures and their related traditions, we hope to gain additional insight into how to reach beyond our individual, culture-bound perspectives of teaching, learning and worldview. This study is uniquely positioned in that these extensions and transformations of understanding are at the very root of reflective thought, so that our analysis is a metacognitive analysis of our very reflective thought and transformative itself. That is, we are using the method we are studying.

Miles and Huberman (1994) defined the literature review as largely an investigative and critical process during which the researchers gradually made sense of a social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, cataloguing and classifying the data reported in accounts of the object of study. The purpose of the literature review was to provide a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings (Creswell, 2003). The reason for this study was to establish an in-depth understanding of Confucian humanism and Mezirow's theory of reflectivity to appreciate adult learning from a different perspective.

**Confucius’ Silent Reflection**

Confucius' major concern lies in his quest for self-realization. He reminds his followers (adult learners) to be authentic persons that are to be truthful to both their selfhood and their sociality. Confucius focuses on the cultivation of the inner experience, both as a way of self-knowledge and as a method of true communion with the other (Tu, 1979, p. 103). Within the Confucian tradition to realize one's inner self, one should be completely free from four things: arbitrariness of opinion, dogmatism, obstinacy, and egotism. Most importantly two major tenets emerge: (1) Confucian thought of learning emphasizes meditation to control oneself and (2) there needs to be an internal integration between self and nature. The learning process that facilitates the development of this meditative and integrated self is to be continually...
As Zhu (1992) explains, Confucian philosophy is recorded in the Four Books: Daxue (The Great Learning) (Confucius 500BCEa), Lunyu (The Analects) (Confucius 500BCEa), Zhongyong (The Way of the Mean) (Confucius 500BCEc) and Mengzi (The Mencius) (Mencius 500BCE) (p. 20). The Analects and The Mencius are the sayings of Confucius and Mencius respectively. The religious orthodoxy of the writings is carefully traced through the centuries as seen in this article’s Appendix, The Four Books Tradition of Orthodoxy.

It is literature of The Great Learning that advocates eight steps that should be followed to reach one’s sagehood. And of course, sagehood is defined as striving to become a genuine human being who through self-transformation, a kind of inner illumination, realizes not only the moral goodness that is intrinsic to his/her nature but also the cosmic creativity that embraces the universe in its entirety (Tu, 1979). In this journey the “rectification of the mind” is a crucial step to extending knowledge of the self (Confucius, 500BCEc). The rectification of the mind is the phrase used to refer to the meditative practice that cultivates and furthers the devotee’s pursuit of self-control and integration with nature. Based on the philosophy and teachings of The Great Learning, self-directed learning is the primary adult learning method used in the quest to become fully human or a sage.

According to this tradition, the integrated development of the sage’s self-concept is not possible without silent reflection. According to Confucius, silent reflection is not a cognitive process isolated from the rest of the human being, rather it involves the entire “body and mind” (as cited in Tu, 1979, p. 103). Derived from the meanings of Confucius’ Four Books, the original meaning of silent reflection refers to a deep examination of one’s being rather than a thorough investigation of some external object, process or philosophy (as cited in Zhu, 1992, p. 20). Of course, this mental activity involves more than the comprehension of something beyond the Self, it requires a continuous process of internalization, that is, reflection, questioning, and seeking to integrate into harmony a resulting change of the understanding of the Self. Within the Confucian tradition it is widely understood and acclaimed that “Study without thought is labor lost; thought without study is perilous.” Upon consideration of the theories of reflectivity from Western thought, it can be seen that these same perspectives are aspired to and appreciated.

Mezirow’s Theory of Reflectivity

Since Knowles (1970, 1973, 1975) popularized principles of adult learning in the early 1970’s in North America, no other theory has sparked more interest and research in the field of adult education than the theory of transformative learning, or reflectivity (as it is referred to in Europe (Jarvis, 1987) proposed by Mezirow (1978, 1990, 1991, 2000). This theory of reflectivity is described by Mezirow as having ten stages that progress from a characteristic “disorienting dilemma” that uses an experience of imbalance in one’s life as an opportunity for considering new perspectives. From this new vantage point one may continue to examine unfamiliar views, critically reflect and evaluate them, test and explore new perspectives as one’s own, make choices as to whether to adopt those positions and finally perhaps reintegrate these new perspectives (King, 2005).

The central focal point and power of transformative learning is fundamental change in perspective that transforms the way that an adult understands and interacts with his or her world. Reflective thinking is the foundational activity that supports and cultivates such “perspective transformations.” The field that studies reflectivity has sought to describe and understand this focal experience of perspective transformation through multiple explanations and terms. Over the years as the dialogue, literature and later research developed, the vocabulary has described this broad, and yet foundational, change of understanding as new “meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1978), new “frames of reference” (Mezirow, 2000), new “habits of mind” (Mezirow, 1997) and new worldviews (King, 2002, 2003).

As described by King (2005) within an adult education setting this theoretical approach recognizes that learners who enter the educational process may realize a reawakening of their intellectual side. As they engage in learning that includes critical reflection, they may question their beliefs, values, and assumptions and begin to discover new perspectives. As they carefully contemplate and weigh their purposes and futures from different vantage points, they may also gain confidence in their abilities and from this confidence be empowered to try new philosophies, beliefs, careers, or other ideologies and experiences.

Confucius’ Silent Reflection Compared

As Jarvis (1987) describes, Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity is an important stage in the development of adult learning theory (p. 92). The power of this theory lies in the possibility of creating new knowledge and different techniques. In today’s Knowledge Society and Information Age critical reflection and analysis holds one of the keys to successful learning. Although Mezirow (1978) never discussed Confucius in a study of eighty-three women returning to college in twelve different programs, he very clearly states that the roots of his theory lie in Habermas’s humanism and critical social theory. Although Confucius never claimed that he had himself attained sagehood, his ultimate concern was not to become a Confucianist, but to become a genuine human being, a sage. Therefore, he prescribed “self-realization” as the ultimate goal of every learner. This goal is not only mirrored in Mezirow’s theory but also another widely popular Western educational psychology theorist Maslow’s self-actualization (Maslow, 1954).

With this brief consideration of how these different traditions gravitate towards the similar goals of what Confucius terms sagehood, this section provides Confucius’ description of how the pathway is experienced. To achieve the goal of sagehood, adult learners must “travel” the way of Confucius as a standard of inspiration:

- At fifteen I set my heart upon learning.
- At thirty I established myself in accordance with ritual.
- At forty I no longer had perplexities.
- At fifty I knew the Mandate of Heaven.
- At sixty I was at ease with whatever I heard.
- At seventy I could follow my heart's desire without transgressing the boundaries of right (as cited in Tu, 1979, p. 46).

To date, critical reflection first appeared in Confucius’ doctrines of learning in the form of self-criticism. Confucius
learners to think reflectively upon their situation, Mezirow's levels of reflectivity provide further focus and explanation of reflection. "Process reflection" involves checking on the problem-solving strategies that are being used. "Premise experience" (p. 104). According to Mezirow, "content reflection" is an examination of the content or description of a problem. "Process reflection" involves checking on the problem-solving strategies that are being used, "Premise experience" (as cited in Cranton, 1994, p. 49). And Mezirow (1991) defines reflection as "the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience." Mezirow's concept of "inner experience" conveys the meaning of involving the whole person. Thus, he characterizes knowledge as the "learning of the body and mind," which articulates the points above, but also further explains the concept of Confucian understanding that this is the way of becoming a genuine person.

Later, Confucius' writings indicate, "I won't teach a man who is not eager to learn, nor will I explain to one incapable of forming his own ideas. Nor have I anything more to say to those who, after I have made clear one corner of the subject, cannot deduce the other three." Implicit in the above statement is that unless reflection occurs, the teacher does not want to help a learner learn. The Confucian perspective on learning and reflection may be summarized in three proposals:

- Learning results from reflection.
- Those who are incapable of reflection are less capable of learning.
- Hence, growth and development cannot emerge.

Mezirow's Theory of Reflectivity Compared

In considering a comparison of Mezirow's theory with Confucian thought on a deeper level, the concept of the "authentic person," or to reach sagehood, provides an additional dimension of understanding. To be Confucian is to become an authentic person. An authentic person must have no arbitrariness of opinion, no dogmatism, no obstinacy, and no egotism (Confucius, 500 BCEb). This sagehood cannot be realized without the rectification of the mind or self-criticism. To Confucius, meditation and self-control help adult learners reach their highest excellence.

Mezirow’s and others’ exploration of the theory of reflectivity and transformative learning led him to a position very similar to the Confucius’ focus on “inner experience.” However, it should be noted that these explanations on adult learners’ making sense or meaning of their experiences included not only an “inner experience”, but also external experiences that may interact with one’s inner experience. King and Wright (2003, p. 102) further recognize this position by saying that more than a “change of mind,” perspective transformations entail fundamental refrairings of how individuals understand and conceptualize their worlds.

Although Confucius was the first one to define reflection twenty-five centuries ago, Mezirow should be credited with categorizing three types of reflection and seven levels of reflectivity. These types and levels of reflection help adult educators discern how adults learn. Western scholars have taken the inner experience promoted and described by Confucius one step further by adding the importance of an external experience.

Boyd and Fales (1983, p. 100) define reflection as the “process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective” (as cited in Cranton, 1994, p. 49). And Mezirow (1991) defines reflection as “the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (p. 104). According to Mezirow, “content reflection” is an examination of the content or description of a problem. “Process reflection” involves checking on the problem-solving strategies that are being used. "Premise reflection" leads the learner to a transformation of meaning perspectives. While these types of reflection encourage learners to think reflectively upon their situation, Mezirow’s levels of reflectivity provide further focus and explanation of learners’ inner experience as proposed by Confucius:

- Reflectivity: an awareness of a specific perception, meaning, behavior, or habit;
- Affective reflectivity: awareness of how the individual feels about what is being perceived, thought, or acted upon;
- Discriminant reflectivity: the assessment of the efficacy of perception, thought, action or habit;
- Judgmental reflectivity: making and becoming aware of value judgments about perception, thought, action or habit;
- Conceptual reflectivity: self-reflection which might lead to questioning of whether good, bad or adequate concepts were employed for understanding or judgment;
- Psychic reflectivity: recognition of the habit of making percipient judgments on the basis of limited information;
- Theoretical reflectivity: awareness that the habit for percipient judgment or for conceptual inadequacy lies in a set of taken-for-granted cultural or psychological assumptions which explain personal experience less satisfactorily than another perspective with more functional criteria for seeing, thinking or acting (as cited in Jarvis, 1987, p. 91).
A Critique of Confucius’ Reflection and Mezirow’s Reflectivity

As has been described in this article there are many similarities when one examines Confucius’ reflection and Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity. With the framework of Confucius’ philosophy and practice of reflection the criticisms of Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity provide another dimension of understanding. Although a powerful model and tool to guide the examination of adult learning, the theory of reflectivity has never been immune from criticism (Cranton, 1994; King, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1997).

Among a number of criticisms, the very first one is that this theory has included little attention to the social context that may strain the reflection process so that the social context may facilitate or inhibit the reflection process (Boxler, 2004; McWhinney, 2004). Secondly, gender and socio-economic class may play important parts in the reflection process and yet they are not frequently brought out as factors in the discussions of Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity (King, 2005). For instance, while in many cultures women may tend to be intuitive learners, men may tend to be cognitive learners (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Therefore should we expect a greater proclivity and ability among women and perhaps less ability, understanding, value, and more resistance among men? These are questions that are not asked frequently (King, 2002, 2005). Regarding socio-economic class, Freire (1970, 1973, 2003) argues that the oppressed have lost the ability to challenge living conditions and thinking about their life. They no longer have the self-confidence to be independent thinkers. Therefore in this paradigm, critical reflection does not exist among the oppressed. What does the ability of and consequences for all socio-economic classes to be able to engage in and benefit from reflectivity?

Thirdly, reflectivity may be age related (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Confucius has addressed this question in his teachings (Confucius, 500BCEc). Noncontrolled studies in transformative learning have shown no direct correlation, but what would further studies indicate (King, 2002, 2003)? Fourth, reflectivity may vary from culture to culture (Baumgartner & Merriam, 1999; King, 2005; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). People see the world differently and learn differently when they become conscious of their social situation. The reflection process may be shaped by different cultures. A recent critique by Merriam (2004) is that a high level of cognitive functioning serves as a prerequisite for critical reflection. Indeed, this analysis of the literature would indicate that without this prerequisite of cognitive functioning critical reflection may not occur. What does this mean regarding reflectivity, education, and opportunity, contextualization and impact among different cultures?

Despite all these critiques, the theory of reflectivity advanced by Mezirow has endured and continues to spark innovative, provocative and a prolific research in the adult education field (Cranton, 1994; King, 2004, 2005; Mezirow, 1990, 2000). Since Confucian humanism emphasizes how to become a sage through self-effort, his emphasis is on the experiential “how-to” rather than on the cognitive “why,” and the road to sagehood is a matter of self-criticism and not only intellectual argumentation. The continuing Confucian “silent reflection” process proceeds from a foundational “inner experience” of critical reflection and progressively unfolds into self-transformation, over and again. While in one respect it has a goal of sagehood, and in another respect the journey is the goal as well.

While Mezirow’s theory agrees in concept with Confucius’ inner “digging and drilling” metaphor and practice in order to learn how to be human, Mezirow’s three types of reflection take into consideration the external situation which poses challenges to inner experience so that analysis, synthesis and evaluation may occur. Mezirow’s seven levels of reflectivity relate to Bloom’s 1956 taxonomy of educational objectives, which helps adult educators more fully illuminate the different experiences that lead to reflective learning.

Discussion – A Model of Learning through Critical Reflection

The strength of Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity which has developed over the last 20 years lies in the critical reflection process, which may lead to growth and development of the learners (Merriam, 2004). If Confucius was right twenty-five centuries ago by advocating that “at seventy I could follow my heart’s desire without transgressing the boundaries of right,” then “critical reflection” holds the key to that goal. Prior to Mezirow’s theory, Levinson (1978, 1986) and Erikson (1959) developed models similar to the way of Confucius. However, Levinson focused on life’s developmental tasks while Erikson focused on identity development. Neither theorist recognized Confucius’ silent reflection as the key to sagehood or wisdom. Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity built upon a tradition of critical reflection that can be found in the humanistic thought and practice of Confucius. Mezirow’s three types of reflection and seven levels of reflectivity help educators and learners more fully understand how one’s sagehood, or wisdom, can be reached.

Confucius’ humanism emphasizes self-realization, or self-actualization in its modern sense. Reaching this goal is the focus of learning for many adult learners and educators from a humanistic tradition. In this context, Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning becomes one of the major factors that assist adult educators in articulating goals of learning and delineating learning processes for adult learners. More importantly, a better understanding of this theory may enable adult educators to:

- Plan learning experiences that are conducive to learners’ critical reflection.
- Capture and build on “teachable moments” to accelerate critical reflection.
- Prepare adult learners for critical reflection.
- Modify teaching styles and methods to fit learners’ critical reflection.
- Become a co-learner in the reflection process.
- Become a genuine facilitator of the reflection process.
- Avoid teaching styles and methods that may inhibit learners’ critical reflection.
- Grow and develop together with learners via the reflection process.

The Model of Learning through Critical Reflection
In our process of analyzing and reflecting on these Eastern and Western theories and philosophies, we have seen a model of learning emerged. The *Model of Learning through Critical Reflection* is described and illustrated below. In this model the work of Confucius and Western theory of reflectivity are blended in order to enable educators to envision the processes of how adult learning from seemingly diverse humanistic tradition moves towards one common goal.

While a Confucian mode of learning focuses on experiential understanding (Tu, 1992), contemporary modes of learning focus on the art of argumentation, or dialogue (Mezirow, 1990, 2000). An overview of the Model indicates that: for the art of dialogue to occur, first there must be a *hypothesis* about possible *solutions* to *problems* followed by a comprehension of the problem to be solved. Following this stage, there is then *data collection, reasoning* and *experimentation* to solve the problem.

The theory of reflectivity offers a tool, namely critical reflection that can tackle both experiential understanding and the art of dialogue. Therefore, this theory furthers Confucius’ humanism and can be further applied to educational settings. The wide-range of adult learning experiences is a complex phenomenon which defies any one learning model (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Indeed discreet, enumerated principles of adult learning alone cannot explain every aspect of learning. However, Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity, transformative learning, provides a powerful vantage point to explore adult learning.

Through this discussion of Confucius and Mezirow the model of learning through critical reflection that is illustrated in Diagram 1 has been developed: *The Model of Learning through Critical Reflection*.

![Diagram 1](model.png)

### Model of Learning through Critical Reflection

This model illustrates the dynamic interaction of factors (variables) that contribute to Mezirow’s critical reflection and Confucian silent reflection. Derived from this model of learning through critical reflection are a number of significant points:

1. Mezirow’s three types of reflection can be dependent upon learners’ inner experience or an external situation or experience. An internal issue of concern has to be triggered by an experience. In Mezirow’s terms, the learners then engage in asking what, how and why questions in order to make meaning out of these experiences...
2. The three types of reflection relating to what, how and why questions are dependent upon the seven levels of reflectivity Bloom’s (1956) affective and cognitive domains of educational objectives. The three types of reflection in most cases predetermine a learner’s level reflectivity. The types of reflection and the levels of reflection interact with one another via what Confucius describes as “inner digging and drilling” to deepen one’s knowledge of the self or what Mezirow describes as analysis, synthesis and evaluation of one’s perspectives to “make meaning”.
3. The three types and the seven levels of reflection take the learners to the next stage of reflection. It is at this stage that learners’ silent reflection or critical reflection occurs. The three types and the seven levels of reflection enable learners to develop the ability to think analytically or evaluatively as well as casting negative judgments. It is at this stage that learners’ self-criticism becomes automatic as a result of the interaction of the three types of reflection and the seven levels of reflectivity. Without the multiple types of reflection or the levels of reflectivity, the automaticity of silent reflection or critical reflection cannot occur.
4. This crucial stage of silent reflection or critical reflection leads to an end result: growth and development of the learner, or changed perspectives of the learner as proposed by Mezirow. It is interesting to note that according to Confucius learning via reflection denotes a rather lengthy journey so that learners could follow their heart’s desire without transgressing the boundaries of right. Indeed, self-actualization can be realized if learning is undertaken via silent reflection or critical reflection.

### Recommendations

As Confucius’ *Great Learning* reveals, learning can move one through a journey towards sagehood, or toward becoming a sage (Shengren) (Zhu, 1992). In its modern sense, the purpose of adult learning is to transform society, in Confucian terms, to love the people, who comprise that society, and to find “rest”, or peace, in the highest excellence. Indeed, Confucius’ humanism is foundational in its impact on the dominant modern branch of adult learning theory — the theory of reflectivity as advanced by Mezirow. Without a fuller understanding of Confucius’ philosophy in learning, our understanding of Mezirow’s theory would be limited.

Like Confucius’ humanism, Mezirow’s inner critical reflection seeks to foster positive outcomes and development in learning. Both Confucius’ and Mezirow’s approaches lead to the possibility of creating new knowledge via critical reflection. In learning, we seek theories that are truly revolutionary and utilitarian. In this sense, both Confucius’ humanism and Mezirow’s theory of reflectivity are useful guides to help adult learners become fully human (sage) or to realize self-actualization and development in learning as in Merriam’s terms (2004).

Therefore, this comparison of Confucius and Mezirow is not only necessary, but also vitally important in our further development of new models and theories of adult learning. Despite its vigor and vitality, in comparison to Confucianism, the theory of reflectivity is still in its infancy. Further research is needed to validate many dimensions and implications of this well-reasoned theory such as political dimensions, viability within pedagogical modes of learning, its role in a “Knowledge Society,” and the multiple factors and learning possible. As of yet these concerns have not been addressed within the Western traditions in which it has been primarily been studied, discussed and developed.

### Political Issues- More than Social Change?

One area of significant interest would be its political dimension. Although the Cold War is over, in our world today it cannot be denied that there is still a considerable portion of our global society that has had political issues and crises...
take precedence over educational policies. In such environments, critical reflection could be twisted to serve political purposes at the expense of learners' self-authentication amid a variety of depersonalizing forces. Freire's work in Brazil demonstrates how addressing the political context through educational applications can result in political and educational outcomes (Freire, 1970, 1973). Rather than mobilizing social change through empowerment, voice and literacy learning, the theory of reflectivity offers another theme of potential impact on political conditions.

By focusing on inner reflection, deeper meaning, and seeking sagehood change in self would replicate as a model and inspiration for others. The model of Confucian reflectivity lends itself to a balance of society/universe through individual enlightenment and responsibility. The basic concept may be seen from this lens as being that to reach community, first self must be mastered. Political goals would be supported through educational pursuits focus would guide contemplating understanding to reach meaning.

**Can critical reflection occur within a pedagogical mode of learning?**

It would seem that the theory of reflectivity has endured in the field of adult education because it resonates with a breadth of human philosophy and human condition- it is derived from Confucian humanism and Habermasian, Marxist critical theory (Mezirow, 1978, 1990). Based on the roots in adult learning (andragogy), scholars may assume that the theory of reflectivity may be in conflict with pedagogy, which emphasizes a directing relationship between educators and learners (Wang, 2005, in press). If this is true, research is needed to find out why the directing relationship between educators and learners inhibits learners' critical reflection. The question becomes, Can critical reflection occur within a pedagogical mode of learning? Sporadic studies regarding how social contexts can strain critical reflection can be found in the literature (Wang, 2004-2005). However, more comprehensive studies are needed in this area in order to produce a definitive model for researchers in the field.

Indicative of these possibilities we have at least one model of transformative learning that provides opportunities for adult educators to blend facilitation and transformative learning with self directed learning- the Transformative Learning Opportunities Model (TLOM) (King, 2005). This model is dynamic and interpretative and opened by the researcher for comment and additional inquiry in diverse contexts, cultures and settings.

**Body and Mind Together- “I do, I understand.”**

The literature discusses the cognitive and affective domains that reflection may involve within adult learners (Bloom, 1956). However, we must also consider the psychomotor domain when learners are engaged in reflection. As a Chinese proverb says, “I do, I understand.” It seems that there is a positive correlation between the psychomotor domain and reflection. Yet, it would seem that researchers have yet to address this particular area. How do we effectively assist adult learners in using active learning in reflective learning within Western traditions?

Building on eastern traditions, do currently renewed interests in Yoga and Tai Chi illustrate westerners experiencing the benefits of focusing mind and body together in reflection, rather than prior practice of mind alone? In 2006 we see an accepted blending of these and other traditions of mind and body. It is a prime opportunity for educational researchers to explore them for instance what learning style or personality styles respond best to these eclectic perspectives? What instructional methodologies are most effective for this learning? What purpose could be served for this application? Health education, pain management, cross cultural learning, psychotherapy, physical rehabilitation? Each of these can benefit form the field of adult learning intersecting with them and many possibilities for extending the application of adult learning are embedded within them.

**Multiple Factors and Learning**

The reflection process is a complicated process that may result in creating new knowledge and different techniques in this knowledge society and information age. In our global and technological society only gathering information is no longer sufficient; successful learning is evident when individuals are able to reflect, critically analyze, synthesize and apply knowledge (Bloom, 1965). Increasingly, critical reflection has replaced memorization as preferred by Confucian learners. In learning, there are many ways to cultivate critical reflection, thus raising the question, How do we apply a seemingly non-technical perspective to the fast-paced constantly changing Knowledge Industries of today? How can adult education articulate our growing understanding of the depth and benefits of reflectivity and critical thinking to business and industry to increase the quality of life in the hectic multi-tasking, information overloaded business community?

Better understanding the connections between Confucian thought, critical reflection, and workplace learning can provide ways to help adults develop skills and strategies to cope with a Knowledge Society. Being able to probe the deeper meaning of information and looking for relationships and connections among seemingly separate scopes of understanding are increasingly valuable perspectives and abilities in our technology driven, constantly changing society. Exploring these strategies in the context of human resource development and workplace learning would be new directions of inquiry and research.

**Critical Reflection for a “Knowledge Society”**

Additionally, we cannot overlook the fact that multiple factors and dimensions enter the learning process and reflection, such as age and gender. Confucius recognized these dynamics when he said, “At forty I no longer had perplexities.” If people no longer had perplexities at a certain age, then apparently reflection has truly occurred. However, what about those who still have perplexities? Has reflection not occurred? Can reflection still be learned? What are the obstacles to learning reflection and how can they be overcome? Indeed, in order for all to benefit from this rich tradition of learning, research is needed to determine what variables lead to this non-reflective learning process and how to surmount them for people of varied ages, races, traditions, cultures, backgrounds and genders.

Examining these questions in different settings and with varied combinations of parameters will be valuable in understanding the complexities of teaching and learning beyond the traditional behavioral sciences. At a time when we are fully embedded in global communications, economies, and dependencies we need to better comprehend how to not only understand ourselves and one another, but also how to teach and learn from one another. As the educational
field invests in inquiry which embraces affective, contemplative, meditative and spiritual dimensions, additional cultures, perspectives and understandings stand to be able to be understood and to contribute to all aspects of understanding.

Conclusion

This preliminary analysis of the literature on reflective theory has introduced the landscape of Confucian humanism and Mezirow’s reflective theory, transformative learning. By doing so we have sought to bring together similarities from these different traditions, and yet illuminate differences by the very fact that these different cultures and histories represent different perspectives. Drawing from a highly rational and behaviorist tradition of the West and connecting with the much longer spiritual traditions and history of the East, many questions arise that help us begin to examine our assumptions in new, thought-provoking and exciting ways.

While examining these different traditions of reflective thought, we have also integrated them into a conceptual model to express the process of reflectivity. Taking a wider view, drawing back from what we take for granted, considering and analyzing our theories from different vantage points, brings new questions to the surface. Undoubtedly some of these answers will be found through future academic inquiry, some through our experiences of teaching and learning, some within ourselves, and some through our seeking to reach within ourselves, outside of ourselves to one another and understand. Learning experiences that create such moments have meaning beyond ourselves.

It is with great appreciation that we realize that through understanding one another we create ourselves, and by knowing ourselves, we can reach one another. We invite you to enter into this journey with us and to share your research and understanding share with our global academic community.

References


Appendix: The Four Books Tradition of Orthodoxy

Han Yu of the Tang dynasty claimed that over the classical period there had been an orthodoxy (daotong) that was passed from Confucius to Mencius and then it was discontinued. Scholars of the Song researched this orthodoxy, and finally Zhu Xi affirmed the system of transmission, saying that Confucius handed it down to Zeng Sen, Zeng Sen transmitted it to Zi Si, and Zi Si to Mencius. In the Liji (Record of Rites) that appeared in the Western Han dynasty, the Daxue and Zhongyong were written respectively by Zeng Sen and Zi Si. (Zhu, 1992, pp.20 ff.)