

Hegemonic Assumptions, Power Relations, and Transforming Dysfunctional Perceptions

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Abstract—This paper will address hegemonic assumptions, power relations, and corresponding critical questions as they emerge through the study of an excerpt from Michalis Ganas' collection of short narratives *Women: Short and Very Short Stories*. Additionally, within the hypothetical context of delivering training lessons on the teaching unit *Intergender Relations* at a municipality's Parent School, stereotypical perceptions of gender roles and associated cognitive habits will be presented and discussed. Finally, an attempt will be made to apply the five stages of A. Kokkos' method *Transforming Dysfunctional Perceptions: A Teaching Method for Schools and Adult Education*.

Keywords—*Transformative Learning Theory; Hegemonic Assumptions; Power Relations; Critical Reflection; A. Kokkos Method*

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary times, it is argued that to adapt to an ever-changing and diverse environment and to creatively manage the vast amount of information we receive daily, we must develop the ability for critical reflection through conscious choices and social responsibility. This ability enables us to examine, reject, question, and reassess problematic situations, realize our potential, become more socially emancipated, and ultimately achieve functional and effective solutions (Kokkos, 2011).

Jack Mezirow, the principal proponent of Transformative Learning Theory, along with Brookfield, extensively explored the foundational principles and cultivation of critical reflection. They highlighted its pivotal role in enhancing our identity, improving our living conditions, and fostering independent and autonomous thinking. This is achieved by challenging hegemonic beliefs and assumptions and related social power relations, which, over time, may oppose our interests (Mezirow & Associates, 2007).

TOPIC 1

1.1. Hegemonic Assumptions and Power Relations: Excerpts

It is widely accepted that longstanding problems related to intellectual and emotional subjugation, oppressive conditions, racism, violence, conflicts, and disputes arise from the uncritical acceptance of ideologies and viewpoints presumed to represent and

express us. In reality, these often reflect hegemonic assumptions and power relations that oppose and undermine our interests (Freire & Shor, 2011).

From the analysis of an excerpt from Michalis Ganas' collection, the following hegemonic assumptions and power relations are revealed:

Women should primarily care for their family's needs, with little to no focus on their personal development and self-care ("Seventy years...they withered/All these years, she never turned back...they stare at her").

"Good" daughters-in-law are obligated to care for their in-laws ("And what they went through...until she drew her last breath").

The inevitable and tragic fate of old age is ending up in a care home ("To hide them...where fate has cast her").

Elderly individuals, due to physical frailty, are left idle and therefore are considered and feel "useless" ("Idle hands...and they stare").

Older adults have no equal right to enjoyment and freedom of expression ("They will not be allowed...to sit idly").

In this context, the role of reflective dialogue and critical-dialogic processes (Freire, 1973), in accordance with Transformative Learning Theory, can help and gradually guide learners towards adopting a more conscious and responsible stance. This involves questioning arbitrary and unjustified assumptions, reassessing the ideological and political framework upon which they rely, and activating critical processes aimed at fostering action for personal and social growth (Mezirow, 1990).

1.2. Hegemonic Assumptions: Critical Questions and the Process of Critical Reflection

Critical ideology examines hegemonic assumptions and explores their societal implications, shaped by the prevailing economic-political reality and established order, progressively leading to social transformation and individual awareness (Diestler, 2012).

According to Brookfield, critical reflection involves identifying assumptions, evaluating them, examining phenomena and issues from multiple perspectives, and taking action (Brookfield, 2012). Applying this approach to the excerpt from Michalis Ganas'

collection, the following critical questions could be formulated to activate the process of critical reflection:

What are the stereotypes of Greek parents regarding the upbringing of their children?

What does "good children" mean?

How do adult children manage the need to care for and protect their elderly parents?

What are our thoughts, perceptions, and treatment of elderly individuals as individuals and as a society?

Are the rights of older adults respected?

Through this, critical reflection challenges the reliability of prior assumptions, ingrained expectations, given and non-negotiable views, and distorted perceptions adopted in our effort to understand reality and our world (Kokkos, 2017). Ultimately, it leads to the reformulation of assumptions to achieve a more comprehensive and informed perspective on action and goal attainment (Mezirow, 1997b).

1.3. Reflecting on Critical Questions

Brookfield asserts that critical reflection influences society and politics, bringing about the desired social change through education. This, in turn, leads to individual awareness, action, and significant decision-making (Diamanti, 2007. Brookfield, 2007).

Consequently, the aforementioned questions, concerning the identified hegemonic assumptions and power relations in Michalis Ganas' text, are considered critical because they enable a multifaceted examination of these assumptions and the validity of the arguments underpinning them. They facilitate the process of critical reflection (Lindzeris, 2010). Simultaneously, they assess how these assumptions were established through various influences and lead to an exploration of their consequences on our lives (Kokkos & Associates, 2020).

Moreover, they enhance intellectual development and contribute to strengthening reflective abilities, creative, critical, and autonomous thinking, ensuring no view, knowledge, or belief is taken for granted. Instead, their credibility undergoes evaluative scrutiny in response to the alienating messages of our time (Mezirow, 1998c). Finally, these critical questions guide an in-depth investigation of assumptions and beliefs, avoiding uncritical conclusions through a deliberate and intentional cognitive process (Kokkos, 2017).

TOPIC 2

2.1. Educational Intervention: "Gender Inequality: Stereotypes and Myths"

Stereotypes related to the roles of both genders are tied to prejudices that unjustly and arbitrarily attribute illogical characteristics to each gender (Antonopoulou, 1999). These stereotypes significantly shape and reinforce gender roles, potentially hindering the development of talents, abilities, and skills (Dragona, 2001).

In other words, societal expectations and demands associated with gender identity and attributes manifest as stereotypical expressions. These expectations prescribe fixed behaviors deeply ingrained in human consciousness and perpetuated within families through upbringing (Astrinaki et al., 2012).

In the hypothetical context of delivering training seminars at a municipality's "Parent School" on Intergender Relations, and upon identifying confusions and stereotypical perceptions regarding gender roles, my educational intervention titled "Gender Inequality: Stereotypes and Myths" would primarily focus on transforming problematic and stereotypical social beliefs among learners.

Examples of such stereotypes include:

Boys excel in STEM, while girls favor the humanities.

Boys are naturally more violent.

Certain jobs are exclusively for men or women.

Only men can be charismatic leaders.

Men should earn higher wages because they primarily support families.

Women are better suited for childcare and household tasks.

Women victims of domestic violence are weak and provoke abuse through their behavior.

Women show greater sensitivity and empathy in interpersonal relationships (Natsiopoulou & Yiannoula, 1996).

2.2. Transforming Dysfunctional Perceptions: Applying A. Kokkos' Method

Mezirow (1991a) argued that revising problematic or stereotypical views can change the overarching dysfunctional cognitive habit encompassing them. True transformative learning occurs when a cognitive habit is creatively and functionally modified. Similarly, the main objective of A. Kokkos' method for addressing dysfunctional perceptions is for learners to develop critical thinking and reflection on the stereotypical views they have internalized or are pervasive in society. This enables them to adopt a structured, functional, and organized way of thinking, perceiving, and acting (Kokkos & Associates, 2020).

For the subject at hand, focusing on stereotypical views concerning gender roles in the teaching unit Intergender Relations, the application of Kokkos' five-stage method would proceed as follows:

Identifying Stereotypical Views: Using open dialogue and discussion or through incidental insights from the educational process, learners' views on intergender relations would be identified.

Categorizing and Contextualizing Problematic Views: Based on initial findings, problematic views would be precisely defined, ranked, and categorized within their cognitive habit (social type in this case).

Designing and Implementing Activities: Targeted activities related to intergender relations would be organized, emphasizing creative use of positive teaching content elements, such as experiential exercises, interdisciplinary projects, or art.

Evaluating the Transformative Process: The degree to which dysfunctional views or broader cognitive habits regarding gender roles have been revised would be assessed through open dialogue and evaluation.

Planning Further Actions: Learners could engage in reflective study, systematic engagement with art, or collaborative efforts to continue transformative practices.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed hegemonic assumptions and power relations identified in an excerpt from Michalis Ganas' collection of narratives. Critical questions were formulated to trigger critical reflection, facilitating intellectual development and independent thought. Additionally, stereotypical views and cognitive habits concerning gender roles were presented, along with an attempt to apply A. Kokkos' method for transforming dysfunctional perceptions.

Ultimately, distinguishing, challenging, and transforming dysfunctional and baseless views, hegemonic assumptions, power relations, and beliefs, as well as acting with rational judgment and autonomy, remain both a perennial problem and a challenge for transcendence. Transformative learning, critical dialogue, and reflection are deemed essential today as means to address multiple challenges, strengthen anti-hegemonic practices, and resolve complex dilemmas and negative phenomena such as alienation, mass culture, violence, prejudice, and racism.

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