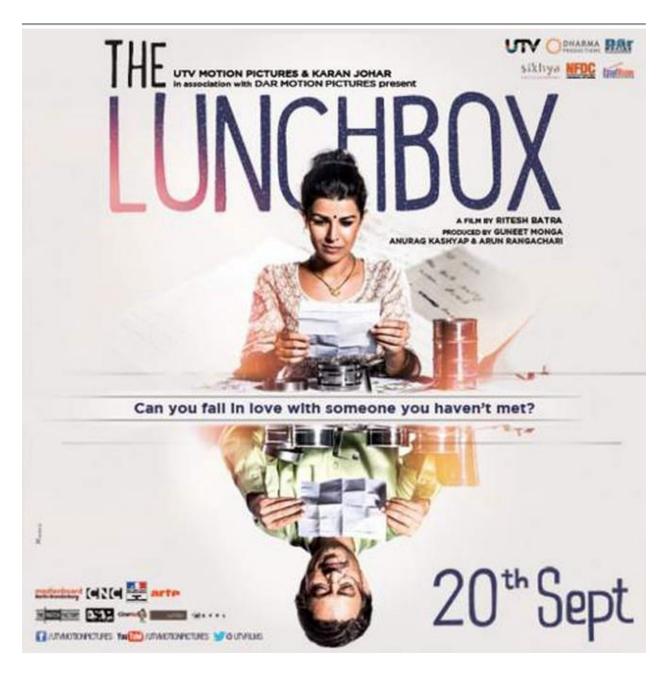**Analysis of critical, non-western, and global perspectives on adult learning through Ritesh Batara's "The Lunchbox"**

Introduction

The film "The Lunchbox" by Ritesh Batara captures different characters as they struggle against social dominant ideologies. Both Sajaan and Ila struggle to find their place in the world. Sajaan struggles to accept his age and Illa is confined by her gender. In this news

story, I aim to explain why critical theory provides a framework to understand these complex characters. I will also provide suggested learning experiences for each character. Last, I will suggest some topics that could be used in furthering one's education about adult learning.

Critical Theory

Critical Education Theory
*[Critical Education Theory evolves from the wider discipline of Critical (Social) Theory, and looks at the ways in which…](www.tonywardedu.com)*www.tonywardedu.com

Critical theory, by definition, seeks to describe the "process by which people learn to recognize how unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices. These ideologies shape behavior and keep an unequal system intact by making it appear normal." (Brookfield, quoted in Merriam-Bierema, 2014, pg. 215). Merriam and Bierema explain that "Critical theory helps us do three important things 1) it gives us a framework for critiquing social conditions 2) it challenges universal truths or dominant ideologies 3) it seeks social emancipation and the elimination of oppression." (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, pg. 214) This definition of critical theory provides an appropriate framework for analyzing both Sajaan and Ila characters in the film, "The Lunchbox."

Saajan is on the verge of retirement and is confronted with the dominant ideologies surrounding older adults. Throughout the film, Batra makes clever use of focus on Sajaan's glasses. His glasses are are the most present, recurring reminder that Sajaan is aging. His glasses case, and the placement of his glasses, is made prominent in many scenes, symbolizing Sajaan's age. Near the end of the film, there are constant, daily reminders that Sajaan is aging. As he prepares to meet Ila for the first time, he continuously checks his reflection and notices his gray hair and wrinkled face. As he boards the bus, a younger man asks if he would like his seat, as a sign of respect. Because of Sajaan's non-western culture "identity, self-concept, and self-esteem are

developed and enhanced only in relation to others." (Merriam et. al, 2007, pg. 237). As he ages, he loses his "power status" in the community. His expression and actions makes it clear that he feels less important and powerful because other's now view him in a different light. Sandlin explains that "structural systems of privilege and oppression, based on race, gender, and class, that influence learning does not consider how culture impacts a person's development and ways of learning." (Sandlin, 2005, pg. 28). Sajaan's entire identity is based on how other's view him, so he feels as though he is losing part of himself.
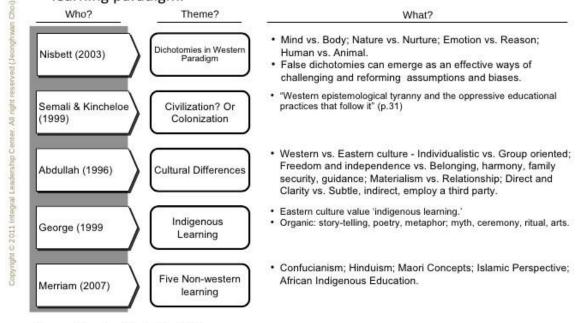

Ila is confined by her gender. She struggles in a loveless marriage where her husband would rather pay attention to technology than her. She lives to cook and take care of their daughter, but does not have a life of her own.The feminist perspective in critical theory "argues that gender is a basic organizing principle of all known societies and that, along with race, class, and the sheer specificity of historical circumstance, it profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives." (Sandlin, 2005, pg. 32). Critical theory works to address and challenge this ideology. Ila is also rendered powerless by the relationship with her husband. Kilgore explains that "there is a direct link between knowledge and power…power is not held by one individual, but rather is present in the relationships among them. (Kilgore, 2001, pg. 57).

The Non-Western Perspective & Creating Learning Experiences

CULTURAL DICHOTOMY (WESTERN VS. NON-WESTERN?)

In non-Western learning, collective and indigenous learning are dominant while rationalism and individual learning are dominant in the Western learning paradigm.

Who?	Theme?	What?
Nisbett (2003)	Dichotomies in Western Paradigm	• Mind vs. Body; Nature vs. Nurture; Emotion vs. Reason; Human vs. Animal. • False dichotomies can emerge as an effective ways of challenging and reforming assumptions and biases.
Semali & Kincheloe (1999)	Civilization? Or Colonization	• "Western epistemological tyranny and the oppressive educational practices that follow it" (p.31)
Abdullah (1996)	Cultural Differences	• Western vs. Eastern culture - Individualistic vs. Group oriented; Freedom and independence vs. Belonging, harmony, family security, guidance; Materialism vs. Relationship; Direct and Clarity vs. Subtle, indirect, employ a third party.
George (1999	Indigenous Learning	• Eastern culture value 'indigenous learning.' • Organic: story-telling, poetry, metaphor; myth, ceremony, ritual, arts.
Merriam (2007)	Five Non-western learning	• Confucianism; Hinduism; Maori Concepts; Islamic Perspective; African Indigenous Education.

*Source: Merriam & Cafarella (2007)

3

Adult education has long been rooted in a Western, self-directed perspective. Fean describes education as "a process of reproducing knowledge and ways of knowing within a society." (Fean, 2012, pg. 690). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner then go to explain that "the knowledge base that has developed around learning and adult learning has been shaped by what counts as knowledge in a Western paradigm." (Merriam et. al, 2007, pg. 217). If education reproduces knowledge, and that knowledge is rooted in western cultures, educators as a whole are ignoring a large amount of students entering their classrooms. Sandlin claims that "to continue to promote learning theories that have individual achievement as a universal goal is to continue racism in adult education." (Sandlin, 2005, pg. 30). In order to create a successful learning experience the adult educator must work to understand and enable students who have non western tradition and culture.

To design a learning experience for Ila, one must understand Ila's culture and prior learning experiences. Culture can be defined as "the sum of total ways of living built up by a group of human beings which is transmitted from one generation to another." (Kennedy, 2002, pg.430) If I were creating a class with many non-western students like Ila, I would want to try to work to develop a culturally sensitive pedagogy. Kennedy explains that "socio-cultural insights and understanding of students' previous learning experiences can help." (Kennedy, 2002, pg. 442). Hamadan speaks to the praises of a culturally relevant pedagogy as well and explains that "CRP enables teachers to 'have high expectations for their students and learning…not at the expense of

losing cultural identity.'" He suggests to use "modeling, scaffolding, clarification of challenging curriculum using student's strengths as starting points and teachers sharing responsibilities for students success." (Hamadan, 2014, pg. 218).

To create this environment, my first assignment would be an expanded version of an "All About Me" presentation. I would have students share their culture, experiences, and preferences with peers in groups before turning in to me. It would me to see a glimpse into how each learner thinks and views the world. Because interdependence is a heavy theme in non-western cultures, I would make sure that there are many opportunities for collaborative assignments in the classroom.

Consideration of Exceptional Adults

As a special educator at the secondary level, I was surprised to there was little to no mention of students with diabilties. I teach students who have mild-moderate disabilities such as ADHD, Asperger's, and mild learning disabilities and many of these students are college-bound. I am very interested in exploring how these students learn/manage their courses differently from their neuro-typical peers. The real question to explore is how do we as educators become of aware of and teach to these exceptional students? What can we do to ensure that we continue to fight against the dominant ideologies and provide the best education to these students? How can we best help our students who struggle the most?

Conclusion

Analyzing Sajaan and Ila from "The Lunchbox" provides an example of how to use critical theory to explore and challenge dominant ideologies in non-western cultures. Since many "learning theories can work to privilege a particular ethno-racial ideological perspective through rendering it invisible, thus making it normative," the educator must work to develop a culturally relevant pedagogy and understand and embrace the non-western traditions and values that learners bring to the classroom. (Kovach, 2010, pg. 33)

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