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Incorporating Critical Pedagogy into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Making the Journey Alongside Our Students

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Abstract

In this paper we draw on our teaching and learning experiences in the management classroom, to illustrate how reflective teaching practices and experiential learning can be used to incorporate critical pedagogy into the SoTL. The exercise described within is one which, at first glance, appears very simple and straight forward, and is perhaps the most basic example of all our experiential practices. However, we found this simple exercise to have powerful learning and reflection effects for both the students and ourselves. This experience, and our subsequent pedagogical reflection, reaffirms the need for educators to remain present in the classroom, and reflective about the impacts of their teaching practices on students.

Keywords

Critical pedagogy, SoTL, Scholarship of teaching and learning

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Abstract

In this paper we draw on our teaching and learning experiences in the management classroom, to illustrate how reflective teaching practices and experiential learning can be used to incorporate critical pedagogy into the SoTL. The exercise described within is one which, at first glance, appears very simple and straight forward, and is perhaps the most basic example of all our experiential practices. However, we found this simple exercise to have powerful learning and reflection effects for both the students and ourselves. This experience, and our subsequent pedagogical reflection, reaffirms the need for educators to remain present in the classroom, and reflective about the impacts of their teaching practices on students.

Introduction

The calls for a re-examination of business school curricula have been growing (Berry, 2009; Natale & Sora, 2010), to reflect widening societal, political and corporate concern regarding the impact of business decisions on the inhabitants of our world. Indeed, the calls have reached the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) domain, which has itself been described as lacking critique (Servage, 2009). In light of these calls, we present our experiences with introducing critical management perspectives to the undergraduate classroom. In this paper we draw on our teaching and learning experiences to illustrate how reflective teaching practices and experiential learning can be used to incorporate critical pedagogy into the SoTL. In doing so, we demonstrate our students growing awareness and understanding of a range of influences impacting not only on themselves and their actions; but also how their actions may impact on others.

The exercise described within is one which, at first glance, appears very simple and straight forward, and is perhaps the most basic example of all our experiential practices. As such, we initially considered it a mere 'icebreaker', rather than an opportunity for transformational teaching and learning. However, we found this simple exercise to have powerful learning and reflection effects for both the students, and ourselves. This experience, and our subsequent pedagogical reflection, reaffirms the need for educators to remain present in the classroom, and reflective about the impacts of their teaching practices on students.

We came to the course as relative newcomers, a position which enabled us to gain a reflective clarity that might have eluded us, had we been historically immersed in the

curricula. Suzanne has been teaching for several years, but not specifically in the career/human resource management field. Fiona studied the paper ten years ago as a student; now returning as a doctoral candidate, she was working to develop her teaching practice, and was also interested in reflecting upon the outcomes of the course a decade later. From the outset we both approached the course with a reflective intent. While discussing career development and management with our students, we were both conscious that our own experiences as part of the course teaching team would also impact on our own careers. Our experiences and reflection demonstrate the potential for introducing and encouraging a critical perspective in the management classroom. From a pedagogical perspective the importance of remaining deeply reflective of taken-for-granted pedagogical nuances and techniques is highlighted, so we may remain true to our teaching philosophies, practices and aspired outcomes.

Critical Scholarship of Management Teaching and Learning?

Mayo (1999) observes how *"like all education, adult education is not neutral and is very much tied to hegemonic interests within a given society"* (p. 127). However, the political nature of higher education is at odds with the pseudo-scientific curricula offered by most business schools (Natale & Sora, 2010). Such critique of business schools has been widely voiced (Barnes & Keleher, 2006; Cunliffe *et al.*, 2002; von Weltzien Hoivik, 2009). For example, Cunliffe *et al.* (2002) note how essential it is that as academics and practitioners we apply critical faculties to our own practice – or as Guiterrez (2002) suggests we must practice what we preach. Barnes and Keleher (2006) advocate how a critical pedagogy may help provide students with a more comprehensive philosophical and historical basis for determining their own perspectives. In addition, calls to change business curricula have heightened in light of growing concerns regarding the social, environmental, and financial sustainability of current forms of organization (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Berry, 2009; Birnik & Billsberry, 2008).

However, such critique appears to still be lacking from general pedagogical, and SoTL discussions. As argued by Servage (2009),

although there are many benefits to be realized from a greater emphasis on teaching in higher education, the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) "movement" has been subjected to little critical scrutiny. This work, however, proposes that SoTL is inextricably tied to the entrenchment of neo-liberalization in higher education. Marshall's (1996) notion of "busno-power", an extension of Foucault's thinking on governmentality, is used to demonstrate how SoTL may be viewed as a force that shapes both instructors and students into "entrepreneurial learners" who conceptualize education primarily for its use value (p. 25).

We concur that the SoTL community could benefit from an inclusion of critical pedagogical assumptions. Despite reservations regarding the challenges faced by critical educators (Breunig, 2005; Fenwick, 2005; Perriton & Reynolds, 2004), we believe the potential exists for critical pedagogy to contribute towards answering the calls for transformation in higher education. In a management education context, we draw on Dart's (2008) concept of expanding *'the metaphoric bubble of the business student to include important dynamics of our world inside it'* (p. 731), thus aiming to bridge the divide between radical organisation studies and functional economic-centred models of 'business' education. An integral part of

a critical pedagogy is the process of reflexivity and positioning in teaching and learning. The following section outlines our reflections on pedagogical positioning which frames our teaching and learning scholarship.

Critical Pedagogical Positioning

Critical pedagogy, most widely associated with the work of Paulo Friere (Freire, 1970; , 1994; 1998), is grounded in '*social, cultural, cognitive, economic and political context that is part of the larger community and society*' (Breunig, 2005, p.. 109) and encourages critical thinking and reflection in an attempt to encourage meaningful, transformative educational experiences. As relatively new members of the teaching field, we are currently building the foundation of our own pedagogies, and an important part of this process is researching and documenting the outcomes of our teaching in the management classroom. We believe this provides a useful opportunity to build reflexivity into the foundations of our pedagogy from the outset. The foundation from which we approach teaching and learning is the belief that these activities can be emancipatory. "Human emancipation expresses concern for people's wellbeing as well as development of their potential" (Flood, 2001, p.140). To achieve any level of emancipation brings responsibilities for both teachers and learners. Hativa (2002) observes how the teacher who places sole responsibility for learning on the students does a disservice to themselves as well as their students. Teaching and learning brings responsibilities for all involved - students have a responsibility to engage with the material, just as teachers have a responsibility to provide quality instruction in an appropriate format. The combined interaction between student and teacher, as each fulfils their responsibilities, contributes to the quality of teaching and learning outcomes (Kember & Kwan, 2002).

As a medium for emancipation, i.e. wellbeing and the development of potential, teaching and learning may invoke change (Marton, Beaty and Da'IIAlba (1990) cited in Kember & Kwan, 2002); which may have physical, mental, emotional and/or spiritual consequences. As such, we believe teachers face additional responsibilities as they are potentially in a position of power. Freire (1972, 1994) illustrates how education as a form of power can be used or misused to influence liberatory or domesticating outcomes. Teachers must be ever conscious of the influence their beliefs may have on others. An emancipatory intent helps guide teachers so that their influence may aspire to be positive. Moon (1999) demonstrates how reflective practice facilitates the processes of learning, and can thus help teachers develop and maintain this necessary awareness. Reflection thus assists teachers to not only continue their professional development, but also model Kolb's (1992) cycle of experiential learning to students.

Chism (1998) observes one of the main components of a philosophy of teaching is a description of "how the teachers think learning occurs" (p59). We find this almost paradoxical, as the more we reflect on our beliefs regarding teaching and learning, the greater our awareness (and belief) that teaching does not necessarily generate learning, yet learning is the aspired outcome....To address this incongruence, we reframe our perspective: beginning with the process of learning as the focus, teaching thus becomes but one of the means through which learning may be facilitated.

We believe learning is about invoking change. From an individual's perspective change may occur in terms of what a person understands (for example what is believed to be true,

relevant or important) or it may occur at a physical, emotional or spiritual level. Ideally, change will be emancipatory, able to contribute to a person's wellbeing and potential (Flood, 2001) but this is not always the case. Thus we believe those who aspire to 'teach' so others may 'learn' must be cognisant of the responsibilities involved, and the potential for unfair distributions of power (Perriton & Reynolds, 2004).

Learning is an interactive process – it rarely occurs in isolation. Learning can thus be seen as able to occur at multiple levels and need not be restricted to the formal classroom setting. Interaction is key, as it is through social processes that knowledge may be developed and sustained (Burr, 1995). We draw on Brookfield and Preskill's (1999) insights into how discussion and participation may be used in teaching to achieve such interaction, and hopefully learning.

Typically our actions are guided by our personal beliefs, and thus our teaching activities are in many ways an extension of the values and passions which guide all facets of our lives. Ramsey and Fitzgibbons (2005) reinforce how students learn more from what we do and how we are, than from what we say. "Students are sensitive to inconsistencies in our behaviours" (Ramsey & Fitzgibbons, 2005, p.344), thus our attempts to 'teach' students about concepts of community and the importance of relational and ethical values, in research and practice, will be of no value if we do not also demonstrate these same qualities in our own interactions. Just as we expect our students to be responsible for aspects of their learning, we too have responsibilities in the interaction – we must also prepare, reflect and engage in the process to the best of our abilities. Similarly, the passion we discern for the topics we present for instruction needs to be real and clearly evident, to ourselves, our students and the wider academic community. Yes, content is important, but it is not enough. If 'learnt' in isolation students may be unable to apply content to maximise change. If we are to truly facilitate learning, we must also help students develop skills and processes which are of relevance to their course of study as well as everyday life. We encourage students to look beyond the assumptions they or others may take for granted –so they may learn to apply a critical perspective in a constructive rather than negative manner.

The formation of these pedagogical principles has led us to a pedagogy of co-enquiry with our students, and continual reflection on our teaching practices. One way in which we endeavour to achieve this is through our pedagogical research. The following sections provide an example of one such inquiry, undertaken over a semester.

Bringing Praxis to Critical Pedagogy

Building on our pedagogical beliefs presented above, our attention now turns to how we introduced undergraduate management studies students to critical management principles through pictorial imagery and experiential learning; specifically experiential learning applications within a 4th year career management and development course¹. We acknowledge this work builds upon the strong foundations (theoretical and pedagogical) of the work of Maria Humphries and Suzette Dyer (for example Humphries & Dyer, 2001, 2005).

¹ WMS ethics approval was granted for this research, and students gave full consent for their work to be included in this research.

The research was undertaken in the July-November semester of 2009, the class comprised 36 students, seven male and twenty-nine female. Many of the students were in the final semester of their undergraduate studies. The course is intentionally taught through a critical theory lens, with the aspiration that introducing critical analysis to students with a transformational intent might bring about change at personal and societal levels. In our experience however, the students entering this course are generally new to a critical teaching and learning perspective, and are expecting to undertake a functional career-theory paper. This observation is important to our considerations, as it indicates that the students involved are largely 'mainstream' management students, rather than students with a particular interest in critical theory or critical management studies. Key themes such as emancipation, hegemony and transformation were introduced from the very first session, and frequently revisited to encourage cyclical development of knowledge.

The main focus for our discussion in this paper is an introductory class exercise conducted in the first session of the semester; however we also incorporate reflections students made about the exercise as part of their subsequent assessments². The exercise was introduced informally to the class, so as to put the students at ease. A lot of information is provided in the introductory session, and students may already be feeling 'out of their comfort zones'. An interpretive exercise such as 'drawing' may appear quite unconventional to functionally trained management students – and may create (further) feelings of discomfort. Therefore, this exercise was presented using informal language, as an opportunity to begin working with each other, and practising reflective techniques.

Students were simply invited to draw a picture/image which depicted what 'career' meant to them. They were asked to complete the activity in silence, but were not restricted from including words or other symbols in their image. After completing their drawing (approximately 20 minutes was allocated for the activity), students were then invited to reflect individually and in small groups on what they had or had not included, and why. A series of questions was then provided (see appendix 1) to further prompt and guide these reflections. After approximately 15 minutes we came back together as a class to discuss what kinds of themes and concepts were included by students – and what issues and challenges were highlighted once they were prompted to reflect more deeply on what might be 'missing' or 'unseen' in their images. Students were able to revise their drawing after this review, and were encouraged to continually revisit the image as the semester progressed. Evidence that such reviews occurred was shown through the reflections, with most students incorporating reflections into subsequent learning activities, even when not formally prompted to do so.

Complementary applications of experiential learning and reflection are increasing within pedagogical practice (Kayes & Kayes, 2003; Reynolds, 2009), however the use of pictorial representation may be less common. Meyer (1991) observes how scholars frequently use images to present their research findings, but employ the technique less often as a means of gathering information. Stiles (2004) reinforces this reluctance, suggesting that concern over subjectivity in the interpretation(s) of images drawn might be one reason that some scholars overlook this means of information gathering.

² This exercise was one of many experiential learning activities conducted over the semester. See Humphries and Dyer (2001, 2005) for examples of other activities.

Yet, visual data appears to offer many advantages. Stiles (2004) claims that visual images can lead to richer understanding, as drawings can help capture deep set, internal visual constructs. Pictures are universal, so they are able to assist with breaking through language barriers, and can communicate ideas reasonable quickly (Stiles, 2004). From a teaching perspective, this feature is helpful given our class included several international students for whom English was a second language. Our own concerns regarding subjectivity and researcher interpretation were minimal in this instance, given that the images drawn remained private to the individual students, and each student reflected on and interpreted their own work, sharing with the class only if they were willing to do so.

Reluctance to employ drawing and image representation in teaching and research is interesting to us, given the frequency with which academia draws on metaphorical images. For example, Morgan's (1993, 1997) use of metaphor within organisation studies is well reported; while Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009) and Moon (2003) all draw on the metaphor of the Pensieve (a magical device prominent within J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series), as an aid in teaching reflexivity and reflection. At an individual level, Phillips (1998, p. 18) suggests we organise our lives and behaviour according to internal metaphors we perceive. Breunig (2005) emphasises that one way to accomplish meaningful experiential learning is through developing the students understanding of themselves within the location of the wider theoretical wilderness. Thus, it would seem useful to employ the use of metaphors, which provide a link between the abstract and our understanding of ourselves. Our experience in this exercise echoed the importance of metaphors, with many students utilising metaphors in their career representations, for example, a tree, a river, steps, a path, and a ladder.

Many of the initial representations drawn by the students were based around notions of meritocracy and individual responsibility, conveying embedded neo-liberal assumptions of a 'level playing field'. For example, several students described their images as follows:

"The image I depicted in class consisted of a path of people leading towards a house. I had attempted to demonstrate in the picture that people all need to work together to achieve our goals... In this world I believe we are free to create our own paths."

"My image of a career depicts a boat (with me) sailing down a winding river which slowly narrows as the journey continues"

'When I look into the word career I can see tall buildings, suits, banks and high paid salaries'

"When asked in class to draw a picture of my career I began to draw a mountain as it is symbolic of achievement and the journey you go along to reach the summit"

"For me the image I drew was that of a jigsaw puzzle, which had many pieces. These pieces represented all the small fragments of experiences and information which I felt I required to have a successful career."

"The original picture I drew in class...depicted a ladder like progression through different levels of an organisation, starting at the forefront, operational duties of no particular chosen firm, and progressing through my career to middle management, and the eventual end of owning and operating my own firm"

Despite assertions by many recent career theorists (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004) of an all-encompassing career rich in complex experiences and factors (Truty, 2003), our students' initial representations of their future careers were immersed in a narrow western work-oriented view of success and 'opportunity'. These themes are common amongst the traditional instrumentality of business education (Ford *et al.*, 2010; Ottewill, 2003), and hold few of the aspirations of those calling for a more inclusive understanding of 'management education' (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Barnes & Keleher, 2006; Das, 1994).

The potential power of such images is identified by Phillips (1998) who suggests that the metaphors we hold may potentially control and limit our behaviour, and hence our capacity to perform well. Within the context of our introductory exercise then, encouraging students to critically reflect on their career image/metaphor provided each with an individual starting point to consider issues such as potential domestication and hegemony, whilst also encouraging transformation as they sought to revise their image.

As the course progressed, so too did the students' understanding of critical theory and how it might relate to their concept(s) of career. Such application is crucial to the aspirations of critical management studies, for without learning there can be no deliberate change (Fiol & Lyles 1985 as cited in Gutierrez 2002). Through class discussion and reflection around the key themes of the course, students began to reflect more deeply on their initial images. The opportunities for reflection were both formal and informal, with many spontaneous discussions erupting in class, which would refer back to the exercise, in addition to formal reflection exercises in the form of an essay and in the final test. As the course progressed, many students became aware that their initial images did not take into account external forces or influences, and could thus be seen to mirror hegemonic notions of individual responsibility. Having the space and theoretical tools to reflect on such embedded assumptions allowed students to 'see' their own career image through a new lens:

"When I looked into my image of the word career I did not look into the external influences, I could not see anyone around me which may affect my career or who also may have a career."

"I was highly surprised that I didn't take into account any external influences, assumptions about health, wellbeing and peace on the planet, family, community or citizenship. I found it quite disturbing to think that I automatically didn't take any of these into account."

"When I first looked at my image, I thought that it could be used for both individual and collective futures as a creation in which we each have a responsible part and a universe under construction by free individuals with moral duty to each other. But after reflecting on everything, I do not think this is the case anymore. My image was about working your way to the top, but in some cases, there is no hope of working your way upward."

"Upon reflection, I realise I gave little to no thought to outside influences – redundancy, the environment, family and friends... basically, I was saying that if you worked hard, did as you were told, and had a plan in mind.. you should be on track to achieve your goals... writing this essay and thinking about the discussions in class have changed my view on this in a dramatic way."

Couto (1998) acknowledges Freire's contribution to teaching and learning through the use of pictures. Given our commitment to emancipation and transformation through critical theory, our own application of images within a learning activity thus seems very appropriate. A particularly hopeful outcome from our perspective was the increased awareness many students demonstrated of their own (relative) positions of privilege and their assumptions based on meritocracy. Consistent with the discussion proposed by van Gorder (2007), our students began to move from self-centred states such as a lack of awareness of outside influences or paternalistic perceptions toward more respectful and proactive relationships and interactions:

"Ultimately, we are all part of something much larger than ourselves. Our careers need to stop being so self-focused, and more on creating a place in which all individuals, no matter what country they are born in, the religion they belong to, what gender they are, or simply what they look like, can have the same comforts and freedoms we expect ourselves."

"We have a social responsibility to speak up when things are not right; we would want someone to do it for us, so we must in turn do it for others. My career drawing did not reflect this; it simply showed a relatively solo journey through a life career with little input from others, except where I wrote 'knowing the right people'... from now on I will try to view things from many different perspectives to ensure decisions I make are the best solution for the people they affect – directly and indirectly."

"Most individuals now-a-days are in it for themselves in terms of their career, and they don't feel they have a moral duty to each other and that is depicted in my image. It is all about yourself and how you are going to make your way up there. This can be seen in the saying "look out for number one". After reflecting on what we have done through the paper so far, I am quite disturbed to realise that my image was all about myself."

Discussion

What do our experiences such as those we share here mean for our own developing critical management pedagogy, and for the broader critical scholarship of teaching and learning? The experiences of our students over the course of a semester show that even a seemingly simple introductory exercise has the potential to provide an opportunity for transformational critique and reflection. This development was particularly evident to us, who were teaching on the course as relative 'newcomers', and as such had few preconceived ideas about the course content or its delivery. We believe the contribution of this exercise to the larger field of the scholarship of teaching and learning lies in its contribution to the development of critical management scholarship of teaching. We have been closely following the discussions around the flaws and dilemmas facing critical management educators, and whilst we are ourselves negotiating many of these issues, we remain convinced of the transformational potential of a critical pedagogy. We see the issues raised in this paper – both intellectually and through the reflections of the students, as demonstrating the importance of developing and implementing a critical scholarship of teaching and learning throughout our career.

The students, in their 'own' words, have expressed the impact of self-reflection. The critical perspective has not been presented as one alternative 'best way', but rather has been utilized to empower students with an additional 'lens' through which to view their lives, and

the business world they are being 'prepared' for. As described by Kolb (1992), many experiential learning exercises may theoretically emphasise reflection, however most fail to include this emphasis in teaching practice. Gutierrez (2002, p 547) suggests "students seldom relate academic knowledge with the information they have accumulated through life experiences". The critical principle of praxis involves the blending of action and theory (Breunig, 2005). Critical educators have been criticized for being immersed in theory, without emphasis on how a critical pedagogy might be practices in the classroom, hence neglecting notions of praxis. Bruenig (2005) argues that "Praxis, therefore, starts with an abstract idea (theory) or an experience, and incorporates reflection upon that idea or experience and then translates it into purposeful action" (p. 111).

Our experiences with this exercise provide an example of how a critical praxis might be applied within the classroom. Our students began with an experiential exercise, constructing an image of themselves within their future career. Throughout the semester, they revisited these images, had opportunities to reflect and revise, and consider how these images of 'themselves' might be positioned within the larger context of neo-liberal management education, critical theory, and career discourses.

The ongoing fulfillment of a commitment to critical praxis is shown through our own teaching reflections and scholarship; for the transformations do not stop with the students, but continue through the development of our own critical pedagogical scholarship. We are committed to 'walking the talk' and engaging in our own critical and action learning processes. 'Awareness in action' or 'the discipline of noticing' (Mason 1994 as cited in Gutierrez 2002) encourages us to not only be aware of our practice, but to also learn from our experiences. This exercise has illustrated to us the importance of staying 'present' in the classroom, and continually reflecting on teaching practice and outcomes, so as to further develop our own practices.

Conclusion

These student reflections provide powerful examples of the importance of including a critical management perspective within management education. At a time when management education is under international scrutiny, critical management pedagogy provides an opportunity to bring about transformation in the management classroom. This paper demonstrates how such transformation can be initiated through a seemingly simple, yet significant, experiential exercise. This example has shown how powerful results can be achieved through a gentle approach to encouraging reflection and widening the 'bubble' (Dart, 2008) of business students' 'reality'. Although this transformation in itself is an important outcome, an arguably equally transformative outcome is the adoption of continuous reflexivity and scholarship to the development of our critical pedagogy. The challenge before us now is to determine how we, the critical SoTL community, can position our teaching to enable a larger number of business students (and educators) to experience such transformation.

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Appendix 1.

Notes to complement your drawing of 'career'.

Discuss your drawing with your neighbour.

Observe and describe your:

- a) depiction of family and community responsibilities;
- b) depiction of potential employment breaks;
- c) depiction of interest and skill developments;
- d) depiction of leisure.

What are the implicit motivators included in your drawing?

How well are your ideas matched against the external environment?

What are you doing to make your picture happen?

What will you need to do in the future to see that it happens?

Important: File your picture in your folder for later review.