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Introduction: Teaching from Critical Perspectives

This Special Issue emerged from a 2006 Academy of Management Symposium, 'Making CMS Relevant to Practice: Teaching From A Critical Perspective'. The symposium received The Academy of Management and McGraw-Hill/Irwin 2006 Outstanding Symposium Award and the Management Education and Development Division's Best Symposium Award. Since then, we have added an additional article by Karen Lee Ashcraft and Brenda Allen. The Special Issue brings together seven scholars working in the UK, USA and New Zealand, across the disciplines of organization studies, communications, and public policy, whose work resonates with *Management Learning's* philosophy in that it is philosophically, theoretically and critically informed. Each article addresses different issues and challenges in teaching from a critical perspective, and offers ideas about how we can bring criticality into teaching.

Setting the Scene

Broadly speaking, critical management studies (CMS) is most often associated with critical theory, postmodern and poststructuralist ideas. Based on the work of Marx and the Frankfurt School, the relevant central themes of critical theory are a critique of contemporary society, the capitalist system, commodification processes and managerialist ideologies. Critically based courses often focus on identifying structural and economic inequalities, systems of power relations and modes of domination, with a view to offering more democratic, humanistic, emancipatory and socially responsible forms of managing organizations. Postmodern and poststructuralist approaches encompass a broad range of work covering postmodernism as a cultural logic—a society characterized by fragmentation and simulation—to a more philosophically-oriented poststructuralist critique of representation,

addressing the nature of reality, agency and knowledge. Both contest the relevance of universalism (which holds to an ultimate 'Truth', a rational worldview). Both emphasize the discursively constructed nature of reality: that we are born into dominant discourses (ways of seeing, thinking and speaking) that structure our social experience, identities, and our knowledge of the world by diverting our attentions away from alternatives. Critical approaches reveal the way that we see the world as positioned, based on assumptions that sustain dominant forms of reason and practices that marginalize particular groups of people. They are also concerned with examining the impact of dominant ideologies, structures, systems and exploring more democratic and socially responsible arrangements.

Critical management education (CME) is regarded as the educational arm of critical management studies and encompasses a critical pedagogy (Perriton and Reynolds, 2004). Yet its scope is not limited to Management and Business Schools, as we see in the Dehler and the Ashcraft and Allen articles in this issue. CME, like CMS, has a variety of progenitors, including Freire, Giroux, and the Frankfurt School. Its aim is to open up new ways of thinking and acting by addressing the ideological and political processes—including the politics of race, gender and ethnicity—present within social and institutional life. It is a pedagogy of resistance, social justice and social transformation. CME draws explicitly on work developed in the field of education, as well as that of management, and it may draw on some of the same theoretical resources as CMS. However, CMS has tended to occupy its efforts in establishing its largely adversarial position relative to the mainstream activities of management and organization studies as a field, whereas CME has directed its efforts towards establishing a position relative to mainstream educational practice. Perriton and Reynolds suggest CME 'finds itself in the doldrums—a field of study and a practice lacking energy and debate' (2004: 67). We suggest this is not necessarily so, that there are still pockets of resistance where critique is taken seriously.

Themes of the Special Issue

Critical approaches are often castigated for being overtly theoretical, focusing on abstract systems, structures and language, often ignoring the practicalities of managing and changing organizations. Furthermore, when critical approaches do take a practical focus on the empirical circumstances of organizational change, they often concentrate on the generation of evidence of resistance to managerial control initiatives and inadvertently distance themselves from managers themselves—who may of course not necessarily be managerialist in their approach to their task. But if 'critical management' is not to be oxymoronic, can there be such a person as a 'critical manager' who is not chimerical? The articles in this issue assume in different ways that the 'critical manager' can and does exist, and explore various approaches to developing such a being. As students on management courses are aspiring managers, or managers who are themselves embedded within the very ideologies and systems of power under critique, they might not initially be predisposed to changing prevailing ways of acting. Critique that takes a distanced and oppositional view will only make the task of engagement harder. The aim of this Special Issue is to open our teaching

practices to critique and to explore a number of approaches that might make critical challenges more appealing—even seductive. We offer a range of critical perspectives drawn from postcolonial theory, Marx, Foucault, Frankfurt School Critical Theory, hermeneutic phenomenology, and communication studies.

The diverse articles presented here have in common that they take seriously both the mission of critique and the necessity of engagement. They develop sequentially the core themes of critique and engagement embracing critical sub themes of power, emancipation, difference, diversity, social and organizational change:

- Ashcraft and Allen take a broad view of CME and CMS, discussing how a partnership between communication studies and critical management studies can extend the mission of critique, particularly within a US context.
- Dehler takes the issues of critique and engagement onto an undergraduate course, with a particular focus on using CME principles to emancipate learners.
- Prichard shifts the focus from CME principles to CMS theory, offering a particular way of engaging students in a critique of real management situations.
- Harney and Linstead continue the theme of student-based critique by drawing upon the resources that an increasingly international body of students brings to the classroom.
- Cunliffe offers a way of engaging postgraduate post-experience students in both a critique of leadership and of themselves as leaders.

More specifically, the articles develop their arguments as follows.

Karen Lee Ashcraft and Brenda Allen address two issues: what they regard as the still bleak prospects for critical management education within US business schools, and the need to address the politics of difference within the classroom. In relation to the former, they propose an alliance between communication studies and business schools, suggesting that the interdisciplinary heritage of communication studies and the critical and discursive perspectives alive in CMS can provide fertile ground for the development of critical scholarship and critical management education in the USA. Second, they argue that we need to ‘bring politics closer to home’ by adopting a more self-reflexive and embodied pedagogy and practice that embraces the intersectionality of multiple gendered, raced, classed and sexed identities of students and teachers. They suggest that we can draw on the critical communication and CMS literature to embed relations of difference within critical texts and our classroom interactions.

Gordon Dehler develops one side of Ashcraft and Allen’s argument by looking at the experience of running an undergraduate course in a US University, based on CME principles, and particularly Habermas. Dehler reviews a range of CME approaches common on both sides of the Atlantic, noting that both CMS and CME have encountered difficulties in establishing their positions relative to existing and dominant work in management and organization studies. He adopts Barnett’s (1997) characterization of students as ‘critical beings’, capable of thinking and reflecting critically. He gives an example of a course that utilizes individual and collaborative critical action projects to engage students in critical reflection on the potential for social change. The outcomes and experiences of

these projects highlight some of the challenges of adopting CMS principles in broader management education programmes.

Craig Prichard, following Dehler's interest in undergraduate curricula from a CME perspective, argues that the intellectual position of CMS, with its emphasis on power and exploitation, makes it more problematic than CME in establishing an 'entry mode' to such curricula. Focusing on a pedagogical strategy that can be deployed on different programmes, he identifies three moves to facilitate the adoption of a critical approach deploying Marxian and Foucauldian theoretical frames. First he identifies different types of knowledge and their relation to human interest. Second, as Ashcraft and Allen advocate, he places power and politics at the centre of his treatment of organizational life. Third, he uses dramatic scripts, developed from his own empirical research, as a basis for engaging what is often seen as abstract CMS theory in understanding real organizational problems and potential underlying contradictions and dilemmas.

Stefano Harney and Stephen Linstead build on Dehler's concern with the critical capabilities of students by considering the ideological and metaphorical resources brought to the management education classroom by increasingly multicultural and international students. They argue that these resources can be used as a basis for generating critique, rather than as a target for critique or a phenomenon to be dismissed. They discuss and display critiques of 'Enlightenment' approaches to knowledge and postcolonial critiques of power and the global politics of capital to consider the impact of large hydroelectric dam projects in India on disempowered and impoverished human beings termed 'affectable subjects'. They go on to discuss how alternative resources to those customarily forming the core of CMS theory might be deployed by students to explore preferential and creative options for those affectable subjects.

Ann Cunliffe offers a way of teaching leadership from a critical philosophical perspective, based on her experience of teaching the capstone course on a conventional US Executive MBA programme. She reframes leadership as a relational, moral and reflexive practice, in which knowing who we are, how we relate to others, how we understand our world, and how we may act in ethical ways are core threads to managing organizations in responsive and ethical ways. She interweaves her development of the concept of the philosopher leader with self-reflexive insights from students relating to ways in which they have engaged in a personal process of critique.

The issue as a whole makes a persuasive case for increased cross-fertilization between critical fields, and demonstrates that the critical sophistication of the theory underpinning CMS and CME need not be a barrier to engagement with practical action. It also highlights a variety of understandings of 'critique', and emphasizes the need to continue to explore what it means to be critical in different contexts. Finally, it presents a range of approaches to educating the 'critical manager' of the future, the type of manager that current events in global political economy would suggest is needed more than ever.

Reference

Perriton, L. and Reynolds, M. (2004) 'Critical Management Education: From Pedagogy of Possibility to Pedagogy of Refusal?' *Management Learning* 35(1): 61–77.

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