

Approaching Reflexivity Through Reflection: Issues for Critical Management Education

Journal of Management Education

37(6) 803–827

© The Author(s) 2012

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1052562912467757

jme.sagepub.com**Paul Hibbert¹****Abstract**

This conceptual article seeks to develop insights for teaching reflexivity in undergraduate management classes through developing processes of critical reflection. Theoretical inferences to support this aim are developed and organized in relation to four principles. They are as follows: first, preparing and making space for reflection in the particular class context; second, stimulating and enabling critical thinking through dialogue, in particular in relation to diversity and power issues; third, unsettling comfortable viewpoints through the critical reappraisal of established concepts and texts; and fourth, supporting the development of different, critical perspectives through ideological explorations and engagement with sociological imagination. The article provides an elaboration of these principles and the issues associated with them as resources for critical management educators seeking to help their students develop their reflexive abilities. In addition, the article develops theoretically informed lines of inquiry for empirical research to investigate the proposed approach, which could help to further develop and refine theory and educational practice.

Keywords

reflexivity, critical reflection, dialogue, imagination, pedagogy

¹University of St Andrews, St Andrews, Fife, UK

Corresponding Author:

Paul Hibbert, School of Management, University of St Andrews, The Gateway, North Haugh, St Andrews, Fife KY16 9RJ, UK.

Email: ph24@st-andrews.ac.uk

Introduction

This conceptual article seeks to develop insights for addressing the concept of reflexivity in undergraduate classes that seek to advance critical management education. Reflexivity is often associated with critical orientations to research and teaching; indeed it has been described as the *sine qua non* of critical management studies (Fulop, 2002). One can go further and suggest that reflexivity is *essentially* associated with a critical stance if we follow Holmes, Cockburn-Wooten, Motion, Zorn, and Roper (2005). They use the term *critical* “to suggest both the sense of questioning, as in ‘critical thinking’, as well as in the sense of critical theory—unmasking hidden tensions and meanings with a goal of emancipating thinking and action” (p. 248). Reflexivity is intrinsic to the emancipation of thinking and the overcoming (or at least recognition) of the most deeply hidden influences and constraints: those hidden within our own assumptions.

It was the questioning of my own assumptions that led me to engage with the topic of reflexivity. I came to academia after a career in industry and reflecting on some of my experience left me with some uncomfortable realizations. I felt that life in the last company that I had worked for was unpleasant for many people—and that in adopting the prevailing competitive and demanding management style, I had been involved in making life hard for others. In addition, I was convinced that the pressured and competitive style of work in the company was neither necessary nor beneficial to the success of the organization. For those reasons, I was keen to explore ways in which I could help others to avoid my mistakes. Regret for my past injustices was not nearly enough. Therefore, as a central part of my academic career, I wanted to help managers to be critically aware of the impact of their management practice on their own character and on the lives of those they work with. This need to better understand and promote critical self-awareness led me to study reflexivity and to consider how it might relate to my academic life and teaching practice. However, I have found that bringing reflexivity into teaching is not something that interests all colleagues. Some see reflexivity as an unnecessary additional burden when teaching is already complex and demanding. In addition, people often have different understandings of what reflexivity is.

Reflexivity is a process that can be understood in different ways and is characterized in multiple conceptualizations; or as Cunliffe (2009) puts it, different authors have advocated different reflexivities. This range of characterizations of reflexivity includes descriptions of a range of processes. These stretch from critical reflection (or “thinking about *thinking*”) to more radical conceptualizations that are concerned with thinking about oneself from within

a process recognized as being subjective (Cunliffe, 2004). The processes characterized in this way may incorporate either or both personal introspection (Doane, 2003) and dialogical exploration (Arvey, 2003; Cunliffe 2002a). Such elements are comprised within a set of reflexive processes that are argued to lead to a range of critical outcomes, by allowing us to either examine our personal assumptions in relation to some problem-at-hand or, more radically, undermine the socialized constraints that guide, inform and shape such assumptions (Bourdieu, 2004; Carson & Fisher, 2006; Raelin, 2008; Reynolds, 1998). To attempt to put this idea into somewhat simpler terms, we can say that reflexivity, the critical examination of our pattern of personal norms and taken-for-granted assumptions, translates something from being used for thinking to being that which we think about. If the patterns of our foundational assumptions change as a result of the process of reflexivity (and if they do not, the process is futile), then the actual process of thinking is also changed. Therefore, reflexivity is reflective, but it is also recursive. That is, it is a process of critical reflection that changes itself (Hibbert, Coupland, & MacIntosh, 2010).

Despite the complexity of processes of critical reflection and change comprised in reflexivity, it is important to teach these concepts and processes since they can inform thoughtful, responsible and ethical management practice (Cunliffe, 2004; Cunliffe & Jun, 2005). However, the effective learning of such processes seems to depend on students having substantial experience to explore, critique, and reconsider in order to facilitate critical reflection on their own management lives (Dehler, 2009; Hibbert, 2009; Learmonth, 2007). Thus, teaching reflexivity through critical reflection is a particular problem in relation to typical undergraduate students who will usually lack the necessary body of rich experience. For this reason, although critically reflexive thought may be desirable in relation to a wide range of management interests such as communication (Ashcraft, 2009), ethics (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006), and leadership (Sinclair, 2007) it is not clear how teaching and learning such an approach can best be accomplished in undergraduate contexts, where the lived experience of these management interests is absent. To suggest strategies to address this educational problem, the rest of this article proceeds in two sections.

In the first section, potentially translatable insights from postgraduate and management development programs are collated and potential strategies for working with undergraduates, which build on these principles, are suggested. Alongside these strategies the possible risks and problems arising from such approaches (and supporting theoretical arguments) are also discussed. This exploration of the risks and problems was developed through a series of

conversations: an internal conversation, reflecting on my developing teaching practice; an external conversation with academic colleagues¹; and a “theoretical conversation” with the literature. As with all the other material in this article, it is offered as a contribution to ongoing conversation in this area and needs to be interpreted in the context of each educator’s practice experience.

In the second section, this article offers suggestions for the application of the ideas presented here, along with suggestions for educational research to evaluate and develop these potential strategies.

Insights From Management Development

I have had the opportunity to begin to address reflexivity in postgraduate classes and executive education settings in recent years. But as I began to consider how to address this concept in undergraduate classes, I realized that there was a need to develop specific insights for that educational setting. Accordingly, in this part of the article, insights from research largely focused on management education in postgraduate and executive programs are integrated and used to develop inferences suitable for undergraduate contexts. Teaching insights are derived in this way since there is a dearth of research focused on teaching reflexivity in undergraduate contexts. The contextual translation and conceptual integration offered here is organized as a sequential process that has four principle elements, moving from a focus on critical reflection to a focus on reflexivity. The first of these elements is concerned with preparing students and making space for reflection in a particular class context. The second addresses approaches for stimulating and enabling critical thinking, through critical dialogue in relation to diversity and power issues. The third element is concerned with methods for unsettling “comfortable” viewpoints through the critical reappraisal of established concepts and texts. The final element completes the process of moving from critical reflection to reflexivity through supporting ideological explorations and engagement with the “sociological imagination”. This process helps students to reconceptualize themselves as relational beings, in the context of a plurality of social systems. Each of these four principle elements and the potential problems that may be associated with enacting them in undergraduate class contexts is addressed in turn below.

Preparing the Class and Making Space for Reflection

Dehler (2009) suggests that there can be “no expectation that a single course could magically transform students into critical beings” (p. 41) but advocates

a pedagogic strategy that centers on dialogue as the dominant process and a learning-with approach that emphasizes mutual student-teacher responsibility in the learning process. Dehler operationalized this approach by asking students to apply the insights of critical theory to their work, advocating the use of learning journals, and promoting critical action. Similarly Hedberg (2009) asked students to monitor their own learning trajectory in relation to subject and personal and critical goals before, during, and after the execution of a class, and emphasized the multiple modes of reflection that support learning along this trajectory. In a similar vein, regular feedback to educators (on every class session) has been suggested as a way of bringing educators into this collective learning path themselves (Mazen, Jones, & Sergenian, 2000). Perhaps more importantly, Hedberg (2009) emphasized the need to reduce the amount of content delivered in a conventional class context to make space for reflection. This strategy would certainly be useful in supporting the approach suggested by Gray (2007), who advocates the application of a wider range of reflective tools—in the context of management learning—including storytelling, metaphor, critical incident analysis, and repertory grids.

The application of the insights discussed above is not without potential issues. The establishment of a climate of mutual responsibility and collaboration in the class requires clear class guidelines that builds a “learning contract” and sets expectations appropriately. However, students may find this kind of learning climate to be unfamiliar and prefer simpler didactic arrangements. Thus student preferences may leave educators struggling with resistance from a proportion of the class, which prevents the achievement of consensus. Students may also find providing regular feedback to educators to be burdensome. Alternatively, if they do provide regular feedback then they may have enhanced expectations about the potential for change in the class to a degree that may be problematic for educators.

Problems can also arise in the application of simplified reflective tools that are intended to be used personally in a creative and formative way. Students may wish for very specific guidance in the use of these tools, which can undermine the best use of them. In addition, when students perceive work to be “merely” formative their engagement with it can be poor—and monitoring and marking this work would disturb the collaborative climate. Furthermore, making space in the curriculum for these reflective activities—even short 5- or 10-minute processes—may lead some students to feel that they are being “shortchanged” on content. As with any in-class exercise, it is also possible that some students will not actively participate.

The insights and issues associated with preparing the class and making space for reflection are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Preparing Classes for Engaging With Reflexivity/Critical Reflection.

Insights	Applications	Issues for Students	Issues for Educators
Establishment of a climate of mutual responsibility and collaboration in the class from the outset	Develop clear class guidelines that establish a "learning contract" and expectations	Students may be unfamiliar with this kind of learning climate and prefer simpler, didactic arrangements	Resistance from a proportion of students may prevent the achievement of consensus
	Establish mechanisms for regular and frequent student feedback	Some students may feel that providing frequent feedback to educators is burdensome	Regular and frequent feedback during a class may create an expectation and pressure for change
Application of a range of reflective tools, such as journals, critical incident analysis, repertory grids, metaphor, etc.	Design structured or semistructured tools (such as guided journals) that simplify the process of use	Some students may wish for "too much" guidance in relation to tools that are personal and creative	Possible poor compliance without monitoring/ marking—which would disturb the desired climate
Make space in the curriculum for reflective activities and processes	Implement class "interludes," even if only for 5 to 10 minutes, in which students undertake reflective tasks	Students may not see the immediate value of reflective tasks and feel that they are being "shortchanged" on content	As with any class exercise, some students may not actively participate

The issues for students detailed in Table 1 suggest that the development of a "community feel" within the class might be an important aspect of the implementation of the learning process. As a learning community, the class will naturally contain some degree of diversity and related creative differences; indeed, a degree of disharmony may well be expected from time to time, especially in the early stages of the process when trust is still developing (Jakubik, 2008; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). A good example of the successful development of "community feel" is provided in Christensen and Carlile's (2009) program of "course research," in which classroom interactions are reframed as situations in which theory is developed, rather than delivered. This reframing fits well with a critically reflective approach in which established theories should (to a degree) naturally be challenged, reconfigured, and recontextualized. Such kinds of collaborative approach do, however, lead to additional power-related issues for those in the role of educator. On one hand, resorting to the overt use of power, for example, when

some students fail to actively participate, would potentially disturb the desired collaborative climate. On the other hand, if a collaborative, empowering climate has been developed, then the presumed power of the educator will be undermined. This undermining arises because the responsibility for direction and participation in the class will have become a collective duty. Thus, management educators, in making space for reflection, must engage with issues of power and diversity as a matter of course. But engaging with those issues is also a specific requirement for critical reflection, as discussed further below.

Engaging With Diversity and Power Differences: Critical Dialogue

Teaching reflexivity through critical reflection is likely to be enhanced through open, dialogic engagement with different individuals and so will be potentiated by the presence of diversity in the class context (Cortese, 2005; Currie, 2007; Dehler, 2009; Raelin, 2001). However, the inclusion of diversity brings along with it the power and identity dynamics that are thereby embodied in the class (Ashcraft, 2009). Thus, the inclusion of diversity leads to the need to consider “the interplay of factors like class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and able-bodiedness that shape each encounter” (Sprague, 1993, p. 17). Communication in any group process, and thus collective learning, can be distorted by structural inequalities on any of these dimensions (Reynolds & Vince, 2004, p. 453). Because of the potential for distortion it may be helpful to explore difference as a bidirectional concept—“you are different from me because I am different from you, and vice versa”—and emphasize that this bidirectional difference includes the educator (Cortese, 2005; Currie, 2007). Ultimately, what is sought is not the identification or particularizing of otherness (which, as shall be discussed later, can reinforce exclusion), but a recognition of what is brought to each intersection in the dialogue (Ashcraft, 2009).

Drawing attention to the relational role of the educator in constituting difference in the class will mean that power relations in the tutor–student relationship are likely to become a visible part of the dialogue, which could produce discomfort for some students (Cortese, 2005; Sinclair, 2007)—as well as some educators. Furthermore, management education can mobilize power relations even as it seeks to address them (Reynolds & Vince, 2004); for example, if power is introduced and discussed at the time and terms of the educator’s choosing. Thus, it can be helpful to provide support for a power-demobilizing relational shift through paying attention to any small factors

that can (however slightly) undermine power imbalances in the class. For example, the configuration of the teaching environment, seating arrangements that facilitate interaction between all participants and the adoption of a style of dress that minimizes visible status differences can all have an effect on the dynamics of the class (Kayes, 2007; Sinclair, 2007). In addition, Elliot (2008) suggests that the circumstances of interaction also need to be considered in relation to the “end-products” that are produced and the ways in which they might be assessed. These issues are often addressed through hierarchically arranged vehicles and processes of assessment that militate against collaborative, dialogic learning and reinforce power differentials. This kind of negative influence can be intractable since, as Beirne and Knight (2007) and Case and Selvester (2002) suggest, the institutional conservatism inherent in bureaucratic assessment and accreditation systems limits the potential to explore more empowering and imaginative approaches.

Applying these insights requires that attention is paid to a number of potential issues. Surfacing the structural inequalities that affect different groups in the class will involve bringing perspectives such as feminism or anticolonialism into discussion. Students may feel discomforted by their implied position in social structures of inequality when these perspectives are discussed. Their discomfort might be because their disempowerment is made visible or because their privilege is exposed and placed at risk. In addition, the educator might feel that bringing inequality issues to the foreground raises difficult questions about the educator’s commitment to social action.

In attempting to recognize, be explicit and seek to minimize the power asymmetries inherent in the student–tutor relationship, some additional issues also merit consideration. Recasting the instructor’s role as collaborator could leave students in doubt about the expertise and leadership that is brought to the class. Such doubts about leadership in the class could diminish students’ confidence. It is also undermined by the educator’s inevitable role in authoritative “content delivery” that tends to rebuild the power differentials. More generally, it is difficult for educators to fully “let go” of power in the classroom when they have responsibilities for managing the learning environment and have institutional requirements that favor formal summative assessments over collaborative, formative processes.

If it is not possible to for educators to fully let go of power (a possibility explored in more detail later in this article), then the particular *use* of power should be a matter for reflection. The power of the educator need not just be considered as “power over” students but as “power to” achieve educational aims or “power for” students to achieve their own aims.² It should be possible to have a dialogue with students that focuses on how educational and

Table 2. Working With Diversity and Power in Critical, Reflexive Dialogue.

Insights	Applications	Issues for Students	Issues for Educators
Surface the structural inequalities that affect different groups in the class	Bring perspectives such as feminism and anticolonialism into class discussions	Some students may feel discomforted about their implied position in social structures of inequality, or resent the loss of this privilege	Having brought inequality issues to the foreground, what is the tutor's moral duty in relation to social action?
Recognize, be explicit and seek to minimize the power asymmetries inherent in the student-tutor relationship	Discuss the role of the tutor and issues of power at the outset of the class, and recast the tutor as collaborator	Students may look for expertise and leadership from educators and lose confidence in the class if this is undermined	In (almost all) classes, educators will still have some "content delivery," which may rebuild power differentials
	Carefully consider dress, physical space arrangements to minimize symbolic reinforcement of power	Radical changes in teaching environments may be disturbing for some students	Is it really possible for educators to fully "let go" of power, or is some differential essential?
	Develop collaborative, peer to peer, formative types of assessment and evaluation	Some students may not feel "qualified" to undertake assessment activities, or be resistant to discussing work with other students	Institutional requirements drive formal, summative assessments which students may consider to be the "real ones"

personal aims align, which allows for the responsible, collaborative, and cautious exercise of the educator's power.

The insights and issues related to diversity and power, as discussed above, are summarized in Table 2.

Surfacing structural inequalities and making power asymmetries visible in the classroom might, as Table 2 suggests, possibly cause some complex educational, practical, and ethical issues to arise. In particular there are some hidden traps and unintended effects, as Stewart, Crary, and Humberd (2008) have suggested. They mark out three key issues for educators seeking to address inequality and practice inclusion in their classrooms and other educational contexts. First, they highlight the problem of reversing privilege, rather than eliminating it; that is, they explain how providing special "safe space"

for (potentially) excluded minorities can lead to them having a (perceived) specially advantaged status. Thus providing a safe space for those who might be excluded means that their distinctive otherness is particularized. Second, they suggest that this outcome can then discomfort the majority group(s) who may feel that they are now being (relatively) disadvantaged—but are operating in a context, which leaves them no “safe space” of their own to voice such concerns. Third, such suppressed countercurrents can then lead to disengagement from the minority groups that have now been particularized and at least tacitly, resented; their exclusion is reestablished. Thus the practice of seeking to mitigate structural inequalities might run the risk of reinforcing exclusion, rather than eliminating it. Amoroso, Loyd, and Hoobler (2010) recognized the dangers of reinforcing exclusion and suggested four approaches for avoiding this outcome, which are as follows: employing cooperative learning; simulating status differences in a disruptive, randomly generated way; structuring intergroup contact to reinforce new team-level identities or decategorize individual identity; and systematically challenging stereotyping. Amoroso et al.’s interventions can help to avoid reinforcing exclusion that has its roots in unchallenged assumptions and the unthinking, stereotypical characterization of others.

However, excluding outcomes are not necessarily only accidents of (somewhat subconscious) processes. Others have suggested that exclusion may also result from the deliberate manipulation of inclusive discourses and “counterscripts” that are used to demarcate, for example, those less communicatively able as somehow deliberately nonparticipative (Berry, 2006; Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995).

In addressing the inclusion–exclusion conundrum, the educator is to some extent required to retreat to a position of power or mastery; but this might perhaps be constructed in a more helpful, re-imagined form as discussed earlier. In particular, one way of exploring the minimization of ‘power over’ students would be for the educator to take the role of a (more) central member of an envisioned classroom “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Communities of practice provide a useful model for recontextualizing and reconsidering power in the classroom and allowing and validating student experimentation and participation. This experimentation takes place through a process described by Lave and Wenger (1991) as “legitimate peripheral participation”. Essentially, communities of practice are formed through the accommodation of novices within them via an apprenticeship path. But importantly, they do not have an explicit, formal hierarchy (or, at least, this is not an intrinsic part of their nature) and may not have a fully ordered “center.” A community of practice is not really

organized as such; instead it is constituted around certain patterns of formation of individuals. This process of formation is signified in their progress from peripheral participation toward full membership. Thus, the focus of mastery is shifted from particular persons to community-recognized practices. Therefore, it may be helpful to explore the notion of legitimate peripheral participation in critical class contexts. This exploration may help to legitimate such processes as peer review and the (symbolic) reconfiguration of shared space, as discussed earlier.

The community of practice model can also be used to demonstrate the value of connective participation across communities since without sufficient external engagement and interaction a narrow community of practice is formed. This narrow community then becomes isolated and “its activities become incomprehensible and irrelevant to the outside world” (Thompson, 2005, p. 164). For educators there is a need to avoid the institutional conservatism that comes with closed forms of community of practice. These over-stress well-established bodies of knowledge, thereby conditioning and contextualizing difference and novelty (Amin & Roberts, 2008; Mork, Aanestad, Hanseth, & Grisot, 2008; Mutch, 2003). Thus, there is a need for challenge and provocation when closure of the community is a present risk and the associated trend toward an uncritical correlation between the “establishment” or “standing” of knowledge and its “truth” becomes a possible danger. Essentially, the conceptualization of a community locus where knowledge has value—and can be applied—needs to be tempered with an awareness that other situations and communities can and should cast doubt on any assumed universality of theoretical knowledge.

Prompts and Provocations

Action and application is important and class material needs to be considered in terms of its conceptual content and the potential future managerial practice that it may support. However, the ways in which the class might engage with and react to this content also need to be carefully considered. This consideration of engagement with content reflects Wren, Halbesleben, and Buckley's (2007) identification of the need for a balance between theory and application. Particular care is due here. Although it has been indicated that the language of critical approaches is not necessarily the language of management (Reynolds & Vince, 2004, p. 454), the achievement of mastery of a particular, critical language may itself be a signifier of development or emancipation (Kayes & Kayes, 2003). Thus, one may seek to offer provocations that might lead students to begin to be “struck” or “notice” (Cunliffe, 2002b;

Shotter, 2005) that their own hitherto unexplored assumptions and descriptions might be open to challenge from those in other communities.

The process that is begun through this disturbance—in management contexts—is to open to scrutiny and bring new perspectives to bear on morally suspect, usually unchallenged organization-centered worldviews (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Learmonth, 2007). However, the challenge for educators themselves is to clothe their provocations in language and concepts that are both strange and accessible. That is, there is a delicate tension between introducing the shockingly new and helping students to engage with the potential reality of something previously unimagined. There must be a connection to something familiar in the students' personal or educational community contexts.

The kind of balanced, "accessible" provocation or disturbance that is required to enable critical perspectives might be approached by "debunking" particular management concepts, that is, to take ideas that are usually clothed in familiar language and concepts and subvert them. This kind of debunking has been demonstrated in relation to self-managed teamwork (Barker, 1993) and business ethics (Parker, 2003). Alternatively, one might even provoke or disturb settled viewpoints by seeking to encourage a critical perspective toward the conventional texts and textbooks around which classes are often based. However, as Cairns and Sliwa (2009) have pointed out, this critical perspective can lead to alienation if it is perceived as a wholesale rejection of texts that have been the focus of substantial amounts of study time. Similarly, students may find very challenging questions disruptive and be dissatisfied with learning processes that leave them with more questions rather than less (Hedberg, 2009). Even if the critical learning process has the potential to lead to insight, the process also has potential emotional trajectories, too. Some of these emotional trajectories may lead to unintended or negative outcomes. That is, some discomforting educational experiences may lead to nonlearning (Gray, 2007). Elliot (2008) has characterized typical positive and negative emotional trajectories and learning outcomes. Her insights are summarized in Table 3.

The application of the relevant insights associated with the use of "disturbing" or "provocative" material may raise some issues for students and educators. Introducing critical concepts that unsettle previously fixed viewpoints involves material that students may struggle with. Students may be dismissive of concepts and viewpoints based on unfamiliar ideologies. Taking a critical stance toward "standard texts" may lead students to think that their prior learning was being devalued or introduce skepticism about the extent to which debunking is useful and permissible.

Issues also arise as the emotional aspects of critical learning processes are put in the foreground. Students may find the implicit need for emotional

Table 3. Cycles of Emotions in Critical Learning Processes.

Cycle Step	Cycle of Emotions <i>Promoting Learning</i>	Cycle of Emotions <i>Discouraging Learning</i>
1	Anxiety	Anxiety
2	Uncertainty	Fight or flight
3	Risk	Denial or avoidance
4	Struggle	Defensiveness or resistance
5	Insight or authority	Willing ignorance

Source: Adapted from Elliot (2008, pp. 280-281).

commitment manipulative and educators may have ethical doubts about learning processes that deliberately involve emotional effects Table 4 summarizes the insights and issues related to critical engagement and foregrounding emotions, as discussed above.

Much, it seems, depends on students' attitudes to perceived risk and the degree of learning process facilitation that is provided to help address and mitigate these perceptions (Elliot, 2008; Gray, 2007). As the earlier discussion has suggested, emotional struggles and (management) education may well go hand in hand (Antonacopoulou & Gabriel, 2001; Elliot, 2008; Hay, 2009). In the context of teaching reflexivity, part of this emotional loading is associated with the introduction of critical concepts and unsettling perspectives, which leads to a necessary shift from the delivery of "better answers" by educators to the discovery of "better questions" by students and educators together (Boyce, 1996). The project of critical education and the achievement of reflexivity in that context are concerned with a shift to dialectic reasoning (Carr, 2000; Waistell, 2009). Student discomfort associated with the feeling that there are "more questions than answers" is arguably a desirable outcome.

The important objective on the way toward the development of the potential for student reflexivity is to begin to nurture an attitude of enquiry and turn it both outward and inward. The reflective gaze should be turned outward in beginning to see the social systems that affect and enable individual possibilities and inward in beginning to see the hand of these systems at work in oneself. The aim is to recognize, as Bourdieu puts it, that "I am caught up and comprehended in the world that I take as my object . . . [and] . . . the truth of the social world is the object of struggle in the social world" (2004, p. 115). However, this kind of realization requires some other perspective from which to examine one's own. This change of perspective might be achieved through

Table 4. Working With Critical, Unsettling Concepts and Emotional Trajectories.

Insights	Applications	Issues for Students	Issues for Educators
Introduce critical concepts in relation to familiar situations and/or class material in order to “unsettle” fixed viewpoints	Use examples in class of the “debunking” of managerial concepts such as team working and business ethics	Students may struggle with the kind of language, ideologies, and concepts used in such studies	Students may be dismissive of alternative views that are based on unfamiliar ideologies
	Encourage a critical perspective in relation to standard class texts	Students may feel that their prior learning—in noncritical modes—is being devalued and that this leads to more questions than answers	A climate of skepticism may be developed among students—are there limits to how far their own “debunking” should go?
Foreground and legitimate the emotional aspects of critical learning	Explain the positive and negative cycles of emotion and their links to learning outcomes, in the context of “unsettling” concepts	Students may not wish to be emotionally committed to the learning process and might find this manipulative	Are there ethical implications arising from engaging in learning processes that deliberately have emotional effects?

genuinely open dialogue or seriously entertaining radically different and unfamiliar viewpoints, that is, through engagement with an external or internalized other. The aim of such processes is a degree of *distanciation* (Ricoeur, 1981) from our immediate experience and history, a *distanciation* that leads to what Kögler (1999) describes as “. . . a form of reflexivity that detaches the subjects from their environments, which thereby become visible to them as products of social relations” (p. 256). Accordingly, it is to the development of *distanciated* alternative worldviews that the discussion now turns.

Developing and Expressing Alternative Worldviews

It is to be expected that students will favor their familiar understandings and worldviews and that introducing radical alternatives may prove to be a struggle. However if the struggle is to be dealt with, it will involve exposing students to particular worldviews that they may have dismissed because of implicit incompatibility with their unquestioned cultural norms.

As an educator seeking to promote reflexivity, one does not have to seek *commitment* to alternative and countercultural worldviews; the important

point is rather to allow students to see what new interpretations and understandings may be surfaced through entertaining such radically new perspectives (Dehler, 2009). The desired attitude of reflexive enquiry should lead to a loosening of commitment to all particular ideological worldviews. This process should be accompanied by the realization that ideologies are “inevitable, all pervasive and ever present” (Watson, 1982, p. 274). What may initially be sought is a shift from usual, individual, economic modes of thought and practice in management (the dominant model of “market logic”; Welsh & Dehler, 2007). The shift should be toward more reflexive perspectives that take on board human “connectedness” in relation to, for example, the social and environmental impact of managerial thought, learning and action (Cairns & Sliwa, 2009; Hedberg, 2009; Schwandt, 2005).

Supporting the reflexive understanding and acceptance of human connectedness in managerial situations can also be conceptualized in another way, as a process in which it is possible for students to experience “the rekindling of the sociological imagination” (Duarte, 2009). That is, the goal is to enable students to see anew the broad historical and social situatedness of micro-level moments of managerial/organizational action, instances of assumed knowledge and established theory, and even concrete objects. Such acts of imagination bring personal assumptions into view and call them into question and are important in the realization of reflexivity. Going further, it has been argued that imagination and invention per se is much more important than programmatic knowledge in management education (Dey & Steyaert, 2007). Creative and imaginative activities such as storytelling and metaphor (Gray, 2007; Waistell, 2009) have an important role to play in developing the capacity for reflexivity through critical reflection.

There are particular issues that can be associated with the insights discussed above. Exploring human connectedness is enhanced through a consideration of ideologies that stress collectivism or traditional cultures. But students can see these kinds of ideologies and cultures as too radically different and are liable to oppose the ideas that they offer. The risk of student opposition leaves the educator with the problem of how to enable a genuine exploration of multiple perspectives while avoiding the creation of an arena of political contestation. Addressing this problem through imaginative techniques such as creative writing also has its own problems. Students may feel unprepared for this kind of writing task or confusion about what is required. Furthermore, if the use of creative, expressive forms of writing to demonstrate engagement with particular concepts can be developed, complex issues of evaluation will remain. Creative output, which reveals something of students’ attitudes, personalities, and identities within its content, can be sensitive to assess (Pavlovich, Collins, & Jones, 2009). This sensitivity might

Table 5. Toward Reflexivity: Exploring Alternative Worldviews and Imaginative Expression.

Insights	Applications	Issues for Students	Issues for Educators
Support the development of perspectives that address human "connectedness"	Explore alternative ideologies/worldviews—such as collectivist or traditional cultures—that are distinct from economic individualism	Students may have cultural aversions to particular ideologies and the concepts that relate to them	Creating a climate of exploration of multiple perspectives, rather than an arena of political contestation
Support creative methods of engaging with critical issues, concepts, and theories to develop "sociological imagination"	Legitimizing the use of creative writing—stories, for example—to demonstrate student engagement with class concepts	Students may find such forms of writing to be unfamiliar, or feel that they lack the necessary skills to engage in them	If creative forms of expression are to be a formal part of class evaluations, on what criteria should they be assessed?

suggest that formative rather than summative feedback might be more appropriate, or that such forms of writing should form part of student–educator discussions but should not be formally graded. However, work that is not formally graded will be less likely to attract student participation.

The application of insights and related issues in relation to the development of alternative worldviews and imaginative expression are summarized in Table 5.

The most important issue of those presented in Table 5 is the issue of how creative, personally relevant forms of writing are assessed. There is a need for careful consideration in the evaluation and feedback that is provided in response to such personal forms of assessment. The evaluation criteria will still include a need to engage with the subject of the class, but in my own teaching practice I have begun to apply three additional criteria for creative and reflective work. First, I look for evidence that the student has imaginatively engaged with ideas and perspectives that are different than their own. For example, a male student might do this by taking up a feminist viewpoint, if that is new to him. Second, I look for authenticity. Continuing with the same example student, this would mean that he would be able to allude to aspects of his own opinions and practice that are at risk in his exploration of a feminist viewpoint. Third, I look for how the two previous aspects are tied together by narrative coherence and plausibility, rather than theoretical

accuracy. It is important to spend time in the class discussing these kinds of criteria. The use of examples from published writing or (better) from other students is really helpful in illuminating what is required. However, I do not wish to suggest that I have any perfect solutions for the thorny problem of assessment as what is right will depend so much on the cohort, institutional context, and broader program aims. As with all of the reflections in this part of the article, this is simply offered as a contribution to what must be an ongoing conversation about how to enact the principles of critical management education.

Conclusion: Application and Research Considerations

This article has outlined a sequential process for teaching reflexivity through critical reflection in undergraduate class contexts. The suggested process moves from the initial setup and structuring of the class to the forms of enquiry, imagination, and expression that are promoted at its conclusion. This sequential process is summarized in Figure 1.

Application

The process in Figure 1 has a logical, sequential coherence but it may also be conceived of as a cycle. If educators are truly participative in the class context and students are empowered to shape the direction of the class, the activation of the “sociological imagination” in Step 4 could (and perhaps should) lead to a reconfiguration of the next iteration of the class beginning at Step 1. Furthermore, the process has been derived from theoretical insights largely grounded in educational research among experienced managers, not undergraduate students. For that reason, it is important that any implementation of the suggested approach should be seen as an active learning situation for educators, such that the risks and benefits of this kind of process can be better understood, as well as allowing the “success” of the approach to be evaluated. In addition, as outlined in Tables 1 to 5, each element of the process comes with possible issues for both students and educators. Both educators and students are then necessarily in a situation of risk in such a process, albeit a risk that is arguably worth bearing.

I would like to emphasize that each educator will need to think about the practical issues in his or her own context before deciding whether and how to apply the principles described in this article. Adopting these principles might (at least for a time) have a negative impact on student evaluations of classes,

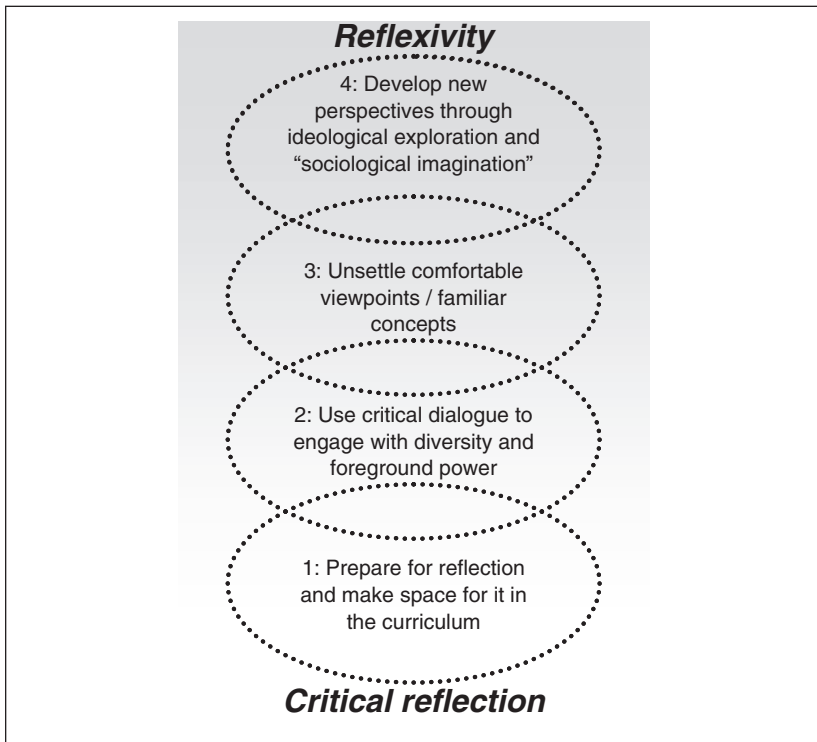


Figure 1. A teaching process for approaching reflexivity through critical reflection.

with potential risks for tenure and promotion. Each individual educator will be best placed to assess the difficulties that might arise from students, administrators, or senior faculty colleagues in their institution, and is quite understandable and entirely reasonable that many educators might choose to "play it safe." Nevertheless, I can offer three tentative suggestions that may be helpful to those who choose to adapt and apply the ideas offered in this article.

First, start at the margins. Reshape optional classes that students do not *have* to choose and make the class approach explicit in the syllabus, so that the students know the class will be different. Second, blend in the new ideas amongst the old where that is compatible with the overall vision. For example, some of the assignments for the class would need to be reflective and creative but the rest might be more conventional. Third, use this gradual process to build up the support for this new approach. Evidencing this support

could include collating qualitative feedback on the class, collecting impressive writing examples from students and encouraging “student advocates” who found the approach impactful and are willing to speak in favor of it. Such kinds of supporting evidence would help to make the case for further transformation of the teaching and learning process.

In addition to the tentative suggestions offered above, there is one suggestion about which I am much more confident: invest in building a network of similarly minded academic colleagues. Developing this kind of approach to teaching is always going to be harder work than “standard” approaches, and supportive connections and conversations might not always be available in your own institution. Furthermore, conversations with sympathetic colleagues can better address the particular practical concerns of each educator’s precise context than I can in this article. Establishing a network or community is also invaluable in researching and refining critical management education as an ongoing process.

Future Research

I suggest that research on the teaching of reflexivity that investigates the kind of approach envisaged and discussed in this article would be invaluable. Such research should have three essential design features. First, it should be formative as well as summative and incorporate active learning and change on the part of the educator developing and delivering the program. A formative approach is necessary because if difficulties and issues are likely for students in the kind of learning process described in this article, then research that explores it needs to concretize and address these issues as they arise rather than treating the situation as a neutral experimental environment. That is, there should be an action research or action learning stance to such investigations (Reynolds & Vince, 2004).

Second, the research should have a minimal impact and make few demands on students undertaking what will already be a complex, interactive, and demanding class. To achieve this relatively “noninvasive” character, the research should thus draw on material that is naturally produced by students as part of the class (such as feedback forms and assignments) to develop its conclusions. This research requirement also leads to an advocacy for qualitative, interpretive approaches to analysis, as most of the data will be of a narrative form, although this will require that the assessable material is carefully designed, in a way that allows research conclusions about the effects of the teaching approach to be drawn. However, such requirements should in any case be the norm for processes of class assessment design and evaluation; *any*

work produced by students for *any class* should be so designed as to enable educators to assess whether the desired learning outcomes of the class have been achieved. Thus substantial elements of this kind of research can, at least initially, be built into normal professional practice activities.

In contrast, the third design principle of the potential research process goes beyond normal professional practice. The research also requires a component that makes it intrinsically reflexive and critical; the educator—as much as the students—should be a subject of the research. To be consistent with the principles advocated in this article, the research should be participative and involve two overlapping communities: the student community and the faculty community. Students might participate in wide ranging focus group discussions about how the educator, the design, and the delivery of the class influenced their learning processes and outcomes. As the researching educator should open up their own experiences and impressions in dialogue with other educators in their field who can challenge assumptions, offer alternative viewpoints and provoke new insights. Such research therefore must be—at least to a degree—collaborative. The insights for educational theory and practice will be developed in and through dialogue with those who have either personal or professional interests in the class under study. This kind of research will not deliver absolute objectivity, but rather support *intersubjective integrity*³; it will be considered to be authentic and useful by those to whom it is most relevant.

In addition to the research design principles set out in the preceding discussion, it would also be illuminating to consider issues of diversity within the program, through careful selection of a variety of teaching contexts in the research program. Earlier discussion in this article has suggested that the teaching and learning of reflexivity might be enhanced through the rich dialogue potentiated that is enabled by diversity (Currie, 2007; Dehler, 2009). Investigations in multiple teaching contexts that span different degrees of diversity could therefore add empirical depth to this theoretical insight.

The presence of diversity has also been argued to bring additional complexity and difficulties in class contexts. This complexity is associated with the tensions between structurally advantaged groups and those that are less privileged (in relation to factors such as class, race, gender, age, disability, and sexual orientation; Ashcraft, 2009; Sprague, 1993; Stewart et al., 2008). Thus the negative aspects and issues arising from diversity-related tensions in the classroom also need to be considered, in relation to how a successful approach to teaching reflexivity might unfold.

In an ideal world, there would also be one further aspect of this research. That is, it should continue beyond the class context and follow students out into their organizational and management careers, perhaps through annual

follow-up interviews or observational research. Extending the research beyond the class would be beneficial, because a process that works in the classroom only takes us so far; my real hope is that reflexivity can continue beyond formal educational contexts, with the result that it will inform thoughtful, responsible and ethical management practice (Cunliffe, 2004; Cunliffe & Jun, 2005). Only information and observations from the field of practice can really assure us that our educational programs really make a difference beyond the boundaries of our universities.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following scholars for conversations that have been essential for the development of my ideas: Catherine Cassell, Christine Coupland, Ann Cunliffe, Robert Macintosh, Sharon Livesey, Caroline Ramsey, and Russ Vince. I would also like to thank Mary Ann Hazen and the three anonymous *Journal of Management Education* reviewers for their positive and constructive contribution to the development of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. I organized a series of workshops on the theme of reflexivity and benefited greatly from discussions with very experienced colleagues (whose names are indicated in the acknowledgements).
2. This typology of power is discussed by Huxham and Vangen (2005) in their work on management of collaboration across organizational boundaries.
3. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting both this phrase and the line of argument offered here.

References

- Amin, A., & Roberts, J. (2008). Knowing in action: Beyond communities of practice. *Research Policy*, 37, 353-369.
- Amoroso, L. M., Loyd, D. L., & Hoobler, J. M. (2010). The diversity education dilemma: Exposing status hierarchies without reinforcing them. *Journal of Management Education*, 34, 795-822.

- Antonacopoulou, E., & Gabriel, Y. (2001). Emotion, learning and organizational change. Towards an integration of psychoanalytic and other perspectives. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 14, 435-451.
- Arvay, M. (2003). Doing reflexivity: A collaborative, narrative approach. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity* (pp. 163-175). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Ashcraft, K. L. (2009). Politics even closer to home: Repositioning CME from the standpoint of communication studies. *Management Learning*, 40, 11-30.
- Barker, J. R. (1993). Tightening the iron cage: Concertive control in self-managing teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 38, 408-437.
- Beirne, M., & Knight, S. (2007). From community theatre to critical management studies: A dramatic contribution to management learning? *Management Learning*, 38, 591-611.
- Berry, R. (2006). Inclusion, power and community: Teachers and learners interpret the language of community in an inclusion classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43, 489-529.
- Bourdieu, P. (2004). *Science of science and reflexivity*. Cambridge, England: Polity.
- Boyce, M. (1996). Teaching critically as an act of praxis and resistance. *Electronic Journal of Radical Organization Theory*, 2(2). Retrieved from http://www.mngt.waikato.ac.nz/ejrot/Vol2_2/boyce.pdf
- Cairns, G., & Sliwa, M. (2009). Towards a critical pedagogy of international business. The application of phronesis. *Management Learning*, 40, 227-240.
- Carr, A. (2000). Critical theory and the management of change in organizations. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 13, 208-220.
- Carson, L., & Fisher, K. (2006). Raising the bar on criticality: Students' critical reflection in an internship program. *Journal of Management Education*, 30, 700-723.
- Case, P., & Selvester, K. (2002). Watch your back: Reflections on trust and mistrust in management education. *Management Learning*, 33, 231-247.
- Christensen, C., & Carlile, P. (2009). Course research: Using the case method to build and teach management theory. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 8, 240-251.
- Cortese, C. G. (2005). Learning through teaching. *Management Learning*, 36, 87-115.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2002a). Reflexive dialogical practice in management learning. *Management Learning*, 33, 35-61.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2002b). Social poetics and management inquiry: A dialogic approach. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11, 128-146.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2004). On becoming a critically reflexive practitioner. *Journal of Management Education*, 28, 407-426.
- Cunliffe, A. L. (2009). Reflexivity, learning and reflexive practice. In S. Armstrong & C. Fukami (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of management learning, education and development* (pp. 405-418). London, England: Sage.

- Cunliffe, A. L., & Jun, J. S. (2005). The need for reflexivity in public administration. *Administration & Society*, 37, 225-242.
- Currie, G. (2007). 'Beyond our imagination': The voice of international students on the MBA. *Management Learning*, 38, 539-556.
- Dehler, G. (2009). Prospects and possibilities of critical management education: Critical beings and a pedagogy of action. *Management Learning*, 40, 31-49.
- Dey, P., & Steyaert, C. (2007). The troubadours of knowledge: Passion and invention in management education. *Organization*, 14, 437-461.
- Doane, G. (2003). Reflexivity as presence: A journey of self enquiry. In L. Finlay & B. Gough (Eds.), *Reflexivity* (pp. 93-102). Oxford, England: Blackwell.
- Duarte, F. (2009). Rekindling the sociological imagination as a pedagogical package in management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 33, 59-76.
- Elliot, C. (2008). Emancipating assessment: Assessment assumptions and critical alternatives in an experience-based programme. *Management Learning*, 39, 271-293.
- Fulop, L. (2002). Practising what you preach: Critical management studies and its teaching. *Organization*, 9, 428-436.
- Giaccalone, R., & Thompson, K. (2006). Business ethics and social responsibility education: Shifting the worldview. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 5, 266-277.
- Gray, D. E. (2007). Facilitating management learning: Developing critical reflection through reflective tools. *Management Learning*, 38, 495-517.
- Gutierrez, K., Rymes, B., & Larson, J. (1995). Script, counterscript and underlife in the classroom: James Brown versus Brown v. Board of Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65, 445-471.
- Hay, A. (2009, August). "I don't know what I am doing!" *Surfacing struggles in management learning*. Paper presented at the Sixty-ninth annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Chicago, IL
- Hedberg, P. (2009). Learning through reflective classroom practice: Applications to educate the reflective manager. *Journal of Management Education*, 33, 10-36.
- Hibbert, P. (2009, August). Reflexivity as a threshold concept: Troublesome understanding. In G. T. Solomon (Ed.), *Best paper proceedings of the sixty-ninth annual meeting of the Academy of Management*. doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2009.44243021
- Hibbert, P., Coupland, C., & MacIntosh, R. (2010). Reflexivity is more than reflection: Recursion and relationality in organizational research processes. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 5, 47-62.
- Holmes, P., Cockburn-Wooten, C., Motion, J., Zorn, T., & Roper, J. (2005). Critical reflexive practice in teaching management communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 68, 247-256.
- Huxham, C., & Vangen, S. (2005). *Managing to collaborate*. London, England: Routledge.

- Jakubik, M. (2008). Experiencing collaborative knowledge creation processes. *The Learning Organization*, 15, 5-25.
- Kayes, D. C. (2007). Conclusion: Institutional barriers to experiential learning revisited. In M. Reynolds & R. Vince (Eds.), *The handbook of experiential learning & management education* (pp. 417-431). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Kayes, D. C., & Kayes, A. B. (2003). "Through the looking glass": Management education gone awry. *Journal of Management Education*, 27, 694-710.
- Kögler, H. H. (1999). *The power of dialogue: Critical hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault* (P. Hendrickson, Trans.) Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Learmonth, M. (2007). Critical management education in action: Personal tales of management unlearning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 6, 109-113.
- Mazen, A., Jones, M., & Serghian, G. (2000). Transforming the class into a learning organization. *Management Learning*, 31, 147-161.
- Mork, B. E., Aanestad, M., Hanseth, O., & Grisot, M. (2008). Conflicting epistemic cultures and obstacles for communities of practice. *Knowledge and Process Management*, 15, 12-23.
- Mutch, A. (2003). Communities of practice and habitus: A critique. *Organization Studies*, 24, 383-401.
- Parker, M. (2003). Business, ethics and business ethics: Critical theory and negative dialectics. In M. Alvesson & H. Willmott (Eds.), *Studying management critically* (pp. 197-219). London, England: Sage.
- Pavlovich, K., Collins, E., & Jones, G. (2009). Developing students skills in reflective practice: Design and assessment. *Journal of Management Education*, 33, 37-58.
- Raelin, J. (2001). Public reflection as the basis of learning. *Management Learning*, 32, 11-30.
- Raelin, J. (2008). Emancipatory discourse and liberation. *Management Learning*, 39, 519-540.
- Reynolds, M. (1998). Reflection and critical reflection in management learning. *Management Learning*, 29, 183-200.
- Reynolds, M., & Vince, R. (2004). Critical management education and action-based learning: Synergies and contradictions. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 3, 442-456.
- Ricoeur, P. (1981). *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Schwandt, D. (2005). When managers become philosophers: Integrating learning with sensemaking. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4, 176-192.
- Shotter, J. (2005). Inside the moment of managing: Wittgenstein and the everyday dynamics of our expressive-responsive activities. *Organization Studies*, 26, 113-135.

- Sinclair, A. (2007). Teaching leadership critically to MBAs: Experiences from heaven and hell. *Management Learning*, 38, 458-472.
- Sprague, J. (1993). Retrieving the research agenda for communication education: Asking the pedagogical questions that are "embarrassments to theory." *Communication Education*, 42, 106-122.
- Stewart, M., Crary, M., & Humberd, B. (2008). Teaching value in diversity: On the folly of espousing inclusion, while practicing exclusion. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 7, 374-386.
- Thompson, M. (2005). Structural and epistemic parameters in communities of practice. *Organization Science*, 16, 151-164.
- Waistell, J. (2009). Management education: Critically, dialectically, metaphorically. *International Journal of Management Education*, 8, 73-83.
- Watson, T. (1982). Group ideologies and organizational change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 19, 259-275.
- Welsh, M. E., & Dehler, G. (2007). Whither the MBA? Or the withering of MBAs? *Management Learning*, 38, 407-425.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *A guide to managing knowledge: Cultivating communities of practice*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wren, D., Halbesleben, R., & Buckley, M. (2007). The theory-application balance in management pedagogy: A longitudinal update. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 6, 484-492.