

The Critical Movement in Management and Manager-Educator Relations

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Education Stream

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Abstract

A notable feature of the 'critical turn' within management education has been the criticism of 'mainstream' management teaching. Critical educators have challenged – if not condemned – the dominant practice in management education as being preoccupied with skills and techniques to the neglect of substantial questions that might be raised about purpose, direction and ethics. Mainstream management educators are accused of working in support of dominant managerial practices without questioning, let alone confronting them.

The paper examines the different ways managers are characterized within the critical management movement, and considers the corresponding roles which management educators supporting such discourses imply for themselves. Drawing on ideas that argue for the position of managers as negotiating meaning at the boundary between often contradictory influences, we will propose an approach to management education which is consistent with this view, rather than one resulting from either unquestioning acceptance or disdain.

In particular, we will turn to Gramsci's conception of the 'organic' intellectual as a useful heuristic tool to think through the nature of the manager-educator relationship. The description of the 'organic' intellectual is akin to Watson's 'boundary managers', and correspondingly has implications for management educators' role in support of them. Managers' mode of practice in this conception involves negotiating meaning at the boundary, and in acknowledging the dialogical nature of the production of management knowledge, we argue for the need to pay heed to the manager/educator relationship within management education. In our conception this requires the educator, in turn, to play an 'organic' role. The paper will conclude by considering what such a manager/management educator relationship would look like in practice.

Background

The critical movement in contemporary management studiesⁱ has been reflected in both the theory and practice of management education; in curricula (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992); educational method (French and Grey, 1996); and in research (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000). The basis for this movement, as Grey and Mitev (1995) have observed, has been 'the development of a substantial, if marginal, tradition of research within management and business disciplines, which may be designated as 'critical'' (p.76).

Wood and Kelly (1978), in developing their proposition for a 'radical management science wrote:

Perhaps the common thrust in the radical movement is a concern not to treat the existing patterns of inequality of wealth, status, power and authority as given, coupled with an attack on current management thinking for being a form of legitimization and support of the status quo. (p.19).

To varying degrees the radicalism implicit in Wood and Kelley's earlier proposals are realized in advocates of the critical movement in management who insist on the importance of challenging the assumptions and ideologies which 'inhibit deeper reflection on means-ends relationships, the current social order and predominant goals' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992:11). This emphasis – well documented in the past decade - draws particular attention to asymmetries of power, conflicts of interest, and the 'technicist' roots of mainstream management thought and practice - practice which is preoccupied with the refinement of methods, models and techniques without due consideration of social, ecological or cultural consequences.

The sense of urgency that characterizes the Critical Management Studies movement (CMS) is due to the significant role which managers exercise in contemporary society. Managers are seen to carry the weight that was once attributed to the church and the military (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992), and as Fournier and Grey (2000) observe, are granted 'iconic' status with consequent reinforcement of their managerial power. All of which has implications for teachers and researchers in management.

This aura of mystification and glory with which managers....have been sanctified by the popular literature has served to increase the potential power and status of management and has provided a fertile ground for critical study (p. 12).

A notable feature of the 'critical turn' is broad agreement that contemporary management education is characterized by unquestioned and often unfounded material in support of conventional management practice. Watson (1996a) refers to 'mindless rituals of preaching sermons about the 'founding fathers' (sic) of management' (p. 463), part of the 'general banality' to which managers are frequently subjected (Anthony, 1986). Whether as an unquestioning response to calls for relevance, or as a conscious effort to legitimize management, ideas have been disseminated regardless of their foundation in suspect methodologies or disconfirmation by experience (Grey, 1997). In similar vein, Reed and

Anthony's (1992) posed an uncompromising challenge to management academics which has been influential within the critical movement.

All too often, the educational community has retreated into a narrow vocationalism in which the overriding emphasis is given to functional and technical skills which crowds out any sustained concern with the social, moral, political and ideological ingredients of managerial work and the form of educational experience most appropriate to their enhancement and development (p. 601).

Disquiet is sometimes expressed however that lurking beneath the critical movement lies a fundamental hostility towards managers and an antipathy to the ways they interpret their role and function within society (Thomas and Anthony, 1996; see also the recent discussion in the CMS email list, for example Chia, 1999). But although examples *can* be found of managers having been demonized within the critical literature, a representation of their situation as complex and contradictory is more usualⁱⁱ. Questions of responsibility and culpability are raised, but as part of more sympathetic portrayals of managers struggling with powerful and often contradictory influences derived as much from personal sensibilities as from organizational or economic imperatives.

The ideas in our paper grew from an interest in the different ways in which managers are characterized within this literature. After briefly reviewing some of these, we will consider the corresponding roles which management educators who support discourses of this kind imply for themselves. The existence of different characterizations of managers suggests ambivalence in the manager-educator relationship. One approach to making sense of the nature of this ambivalence is to consider the system of relations within which both parties are engaged. By doing so, we acknowledge both the internal and external organizational influences upon the relationship, and recognize its fluid nature. At this point we will turn to Gramsci's (1971) writings on the role of intellectuals within society as a way of making sense of the roles played by both manager and educator.

Gramsci described 'organic' intellectuals as men (sic) of action, engaging in 'active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, permanent persuader and not just as simple orator'. In this sense the description, or characterization, of the organic intellectual is akin to Watson's account of managers learning 'to handle the shifting demands of their managerial work' (1996b: 323), and therefore has implications for management educators' role in support of them. It requires the educator in turn, to play an organic role, that is adopting a mode of practice that emphasizes a dialogic approach to learning as opposed to a didactic one. The paper will conclude by considering what such a manager-management educator relationship would look like in practice; specifically an approach which is consistent with a critical yet sympathetic portrayal of the manager involving the negotiation of meaning at the boundaries between contradictory influences.

The Critical Management Movement and Characterizations of Managers

This section contrasts two competing characterizations which we will argue have currency within the critical management movement – albeit with some variations. We have adopted the idea of characterization as developed by Hughes (2000) which foregrounds 'associated pedagogical practices' through analysis of implicit discourses in

the characterization of learning relationships (p. 3). From this perspective the particular characterizations which academics construct for managers, reveal corresponding assumptions about their roles as educators. To illustrate from Hughes' analysis in an adult education context: the characterization of 'Freirian peasant' or 'andrological man' imply different roles for the educator, whether of 'helper, ...imbued with a range of nurturative, developmental and importantly virtuous qualities' (p. 5), or of the educator who 'takes up a democratic position to radicalize the traditional or authoritarian classroom' (p. 6).

In the management education context, the first characterization we will describe indicates antipathy towards managers, portraying them as instrumental and exploitative. The second characterization is one that portrays the manager as having to wrestle with conflicting influences and demands, which are social and moral as well as technical in nature. Both these positions can be inferred in recent critiques of 'mainstream' management education and our summary of them is intended as a platform from which to contribute to a redefinition of the manager-educator relationship.

Antipathetic characterizations: managers as 'merchants of morality'.

In the transcript of a networked conference (Sims and McAulay, 1995) John Burgoyne quotes a colleague as saying "it's funny how management academics don't like managers very much" (p. 27). Similar concerns have been raised about the dismissive posture implicit in writing on management (Watson, 1998; Anthony, 2000) and whether this is reinforced by the recent critical 'turn' in scholarship in which 'antagonism is fuelled by blanket dismissals of the preoccupations of practitioners' (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, p. 442).

Reed (1989) summarizes this position as seen emanating from a critical, specifically Marxist perspective:

managers are best seen as merchants of morality. They act as the conduits for an economic logic that has to be obscured, hidden and distorted in some way or other through the promulgation of various ideological mystifications (p. 16).

There are management academics aligned with this position who will draw on MacIntyre's (1985) damning critique of management's cultivation of the 'moral fiction' of neutrality as characteristic, serving to mask its defining propensity for 'manipulative power' (p. 86). In the same vein, we are told there are few managers 'with any courage and fewer still with any deep convictions' (Van Maanen in his review of Jackall's *The Moral Mazes: The World of Corporate Managers*. 1989, p. 314).

Corollary: implications for management academics

Using the idea of characterization, what do such antipathetic portrayals imply for the roles of educators who cast managers in this light? For some, being involved in management education of any kind is seen as betrayal of a political position. Management academics have become 'servants of power' (Wood and Kelley, 1978, p. 20) whose role has been assimilated into the service of the organization (Boje, 1996) and whose function is to aid and abet in the subjugation of individual aspirations to corporate purposes. Fournier and Grey (2000) have written more extensively of the significance of disengagement as a reasoned consequence of this ideological position.

This estrangement is not specifically a characteristic of 'critical' academics however, for as Burgoyne (1995) observes:

managers and management academics occupy rather different social worlds with rather different discourses and language games, and it does sometimes seem that management academics collude with this isolationism as a result of some kind of a disdain for managing, or lack of confidence in their ability to engage with it without becoming absorbed into the managerialist values from which they wish to keep a critical distance (p. 95).

Indeed it has long been argued that academics who keep their distance from the managers' world, whatever their rationale, are working out of a much older tradition (Sanderson, 1972). There has always been some tendency in academia towards aloofness from anything which smacks of 'trade', perpetuating 'a kind of professional aristocracy that wishes to keep a safe distance from things profane, sweaty and dirty' (Snell 1995, p.29). Similarly, there have been concerns that liaisons with commerce will inevitably prejudice the purity of academic endeavour (Childs, 1969).

Sympathetic characterizations: managing conflicting demands

Recently however, there have been management writers who have pointed out that with the exception of 'a small elite of senior executives' most managers are themselves subjected to the same processes which they visit on others, and are heir to similarly frustrated aspirations (Willmott, 1997c, p. 1334). It is therefore difficult to portray a manager's position as uncomplicatedly exploitative. As Alvesson and Willmott (1996) see it,

Increasingly, managers are victims and not just agents of a rationality that inhibits critical reflection upon, and transformation of, a structure of social relations that systematically impedes and distorts efforts to develop more ethically rational, morally defensible forms of management theory and practice' (p.36).

This more complex portrayal is important to the argument we intend to develop, in that it offers a critical but less judgmental perspective on the role and function of managers. In contrast to more antagonistic positions there is an emphasis on the complex and contradictory demands which is an essential characteristic of the manager's role. Alvesson and Willmott (1996) draw attention to the dilemma which academics and managers need to address of men and women with good intentions being in situations which seem to call for less defensible actions. Managers are not to be dismissed as 'corporate functionaries' (Willmott 1994, p.110) but to be appreciated as people whose values and beliefs are sometimes undermined by the conflicting demands of their role.

Reed (1989) advocates a similar characterization in arguing that to conceive of managers as either Machiavellian or victims of a logic they do not understand, amounts to 'intellectual poverty and practical impotency' (p. 26). As an alternative Reed's suggestion is that

Management practice consists of a complex web of interrelationships between the technical, political and moral dimensions of managerial conduct oriented to the the assembly of those recalcitrant resources that enter into productive activity. Within

this general perspective, we can develop a view of individual managers as practitioners of an art that requires the possession and application of skills enabling them to cope with the contradictory demands and pressures of resources that stubbornly resist efforts to contain them within prescribed limits. (p. 26).

This portrayal is supported by Watson's (1996b) ethnographic study of managers which illustrates the ambiguities and conflicts inherent in managerial work. In particular, that managers are often acutely aware of the inseparability of principles (a sense of right and wrong) from pragmatic considerations (what seems to work). To 'manage' is to engage with tensions between personal beliefs and ideas about what generates effective managerial work, as Watson points out:

Managers....not only have to control their own lives and destinies, like every other human being, they have to assert control of the work of the work efforts, thoughts and activities of other people – employees, customers, colleagues, bosses and so on. To think clearly, rationally and consistently in such a work milieu is an immense challenge (1996b, p. 339).

Similarly, Elliott's current study of managers on a part-time MBA programme shows that many managers are simply trying to manage as best as they can to improve the day-to-day working lives of those they manage, and themselves, through their interventions within the organisation.

Corollary: implications for management academics

A more sympathetic, less dismissive characterization of managers calls for a corresponding response from educators, one which would avoid 'unreflectively attacking any attempt to reform or improve aspects of employment relationships' (Watson 1998, p. 108). This alternative characterization is introduced briefly to close this section.

In the rest of the paper, drawing on Gramsci's ideas of the 'organic intellectual' we will propose an approach to management education based on a still critical but more sympathetic characterization of managers as people working with ambiguous, sometimes conflicting, demands of considerable complexity, moral as well as technical in nature. An approach which, rather than offer simplistic recipes tending to undermine possibilities of critical enquiry, will support managers in the application of what Anthony (1987) has described as 'critical and analytical intelligence' (p. 259). We will elaborate this alternative characterization of the manager and make some propositions for manager-educator relations and management education approaches that would seem consistent with this perspective.

Conceptualizing the Manager as 'Organic Intellectual'

Gramsci (1971) was opposed to the idea that intellectual activity only occurs in the heads of those whose roles within society deem them to be intellectual. His belief was that meanings are creations of much more complex processes. In working towards a classification of different intellectual roles. We suggest that Gramsci's identification of the diverse and disparate nature of intellectual activities is a view of the creation of meaning that is similar to more recent characterizations of managers and the way they perform their roles. Managers in these accounts (see for example Watson, 1994;

Willmott, 1997c) differ from earlier characterizations of managers as the abstract embodiments of Marx's agents of capital in being cast as boundary workers whose principle role is the negotiation of meaning.

Gramsci's description of the role of the organic intellectual was predicated on the belief that 'all men (sic) are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971: 9). By the same token, although we may readily accept that knowledge is not the sole creation of those traditionally thought of as 'intellectuals', manager-educator relations have not reflected this in practise. The notion of manager as boundary worker opens up such a possibility. Characterizations of managers and perspectives on the creation of knowledge are thus intertwined as we are witness to a move away from the more traditional discourse of managers and their practices.

In this spirit we have incorporated Gramsci's portrayal of organic intellectuals in support of re-casting managers in ways which disrupt the more familiar distinctions as between 'practitioner' and 'academic' which we believe undermine more constructive possibilities for manager-educator relations. Central to Gramsci's opposition to the myth of intellectuals as a distinct social category is his view that:

homo faber cannot be separated from *homo sapiens*. Each individual, finally outside his professional activity, carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, he (sic) is a philosopher, an artist, ... he participates in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought. (1971: 9)

We have suggested that a similar perspective is reflected in more recent writing among management academics, emphasis being given to the managers' perpetual struggles between their 'values and priorities as persons' and the organisational demands which are vested in their role. These conflicting pressures should Willmott argues, present managers 'with repeated opportunities for critical reflection upon their experience (1997b: 765). This supports a characterization of managers no longer as engaged in purely practical activity, but as consciously - that is practically, emotionally and intellectually - engaging with demands and expectations that may be at odds with their own values and beliefs.

In a similar way Chia and Morgan's (1996) idea of the 'philosopher-manager' equally reflects different, less hierarchical relations, and resonates with Gramsci's description of the nature of intellectual activity.

The concept of the 'philosopher-manager', critical thinking manager who persists in the vigilant deconstructing or 'designing' of hitherto self-evident social and management concepts in search of the deeper and bigger issues affecting the human condition, is one which will resonate with the concerns of tomorrow's 'managers' (1996: 41).

There are other writers who explore how managing and being critical might be combined, for example Cutler's (2000) idea of the 'cynical' manager and Myerson and Scully's

(1995) notion of the ‘tempered radical’, a stance which is summarized elsewhere by Frost (1997) as a commitment of individuals to the organization but equally ‘to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture of their organizations’. (p 366). Of these ideas we are drawn to Chia and Morgan’s because here there is no assumption that to be critical managers will either be marginal or necessarily become so. Neither is there a sense in Chia and Morgan’s approach of moral superiority, of academics ‘helping’ managers toward some enlightened state.

Managers and Educators: Recasting the Systems of Relations.

As we suggested in our introduction, the characterization of managers by educators is symptomatic of the ambivalent relationship between the two. A characteristic of management education is that through direct contact with managers in both research and teaching, educators perform the role that justifies their existence. However, as Burgoyne (1995) and Snell (1995) highlight, the interdependency of the relationship has tended to be discounted by educators preferring to remain aloof from the same managers whose worlds they research, and who act as the audience for their teaching. By viewing the relationship between managers and educators from a less hierarchical perspective with different understandings of the role and position of managers within organisations, as well as the wider socio-cultural environment, the traditional role for educators becomes equally open to question.

We find it useful to reflect on what Gramsci refers to as the ‘system of relations’ that constitutes intellectual roles within society in that it serves as a helpful heuristic in examining the roles of educators and managers and we believe as a guide for educational practice. Gramsci’s classification of intellectuals into two main sets, the traditional and the organic, forces us to consider some awkward questions about the nature of these practices. But it is not only what Gramsci says about intellectuals that we have found useful when trying to make sense of the manager-educator relationship. It is his insistence that in order to reach a greater understanding of how meaning and knowledge arises, we need to look at

the ensemble of the systems of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups that personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations (1971: 8).

Based on Gramsci’s ideas our concern is to analyse the system of relations in which the activities of management educators take place. In particular to reflect on the characteristics of *intellectual activity* in the context of management education.

Differing intellectual roles

The processes that describe how organic intellectuals perform their role are part and parcel of Gramsci’s broader political position, and are indicative of his version of Marxism. We think it is worth pausing here to review this position because its nuances have perhaps become lost within Critical Theory more generally. Gramsci’s idea of ideological hegemony from a purist political standpoint, requires that we pay attention to

forms of domination that lie outside the sphere of production. Boggs (1976) describes Gramsci's concept of hegemony as

the permeation throughout civil society - including ... trade unions, schools, the churches, and the family - of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality etc. that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it (p. 39).

It is the role of organic intellectuals to be alert to these systems of relations and to demystify the role of the ruling social class. When placed within the context of Italian politics during Gramsci's life, the distinction he makes between organic and traditional intellectuals is politically facilitative as it discards the (intellectually) hierarchical basis upon which a move towards a socialist state was traditionally regarded as necessary. If we take the 1917 Russian revolution as a case in point, here there was a wide gulf between the intellectuals and those whom such a revolution was supposedly to benefit. The idea that either group actually understood the other's motivations for a change in the ruling order is one difficult to sustain given the subsequent turbulent history of the first socialist state.

What we hope this rather brief review of Gramsci's Marxism indicates is his view on the creation of meaning. That is, traditionally authority over knowledge and meaning has been jealously guarded by those performing traditional intellectual roles, conferring upon them as it does positions of power and authority within society. One of the roles performed by traditional intellectuals according to Gramsci, was to act as aspirational role models for those not performing the *social* role of intellectual. But these 'non-intellectuals' had a contradictory attitude to the intellectuals they were subordinated to - both respecting their social position, but simultaneously feeling a degree of contempt towards them. If their position were to have been ameliorated in a more emancipatory way, they would have to have been acknowledged as active agents in creating new meanings in society. The organic intellectual's role is in fact defined by the recognition that *all* individuals are involved in negotiating meaning.

Managing meaning through dialogue

To summarise so far, we have witnessed a move from managers being seen as abstract embodiments of capital to more contemporary interpretations of them as negotiators of meaning. To oversimplify somewhat, the manager is no longer the definitive author, or sole originator, of meaning and knowledge. Seen as boundary workers, they are constantly engaging in overlapping dialogues within which the title of manager only confers an editorship roleⁱⁱⁱ.

What we take from Gramsci's description of the role of the organic intellectual is its recognition that all people are agents of communicative processes. In recognising this, we see organic intellectuals as involved in processes of dialogue that require us to be alert to the systems of dialogic relations of which we are a part. The first half of our paper outlined changes in the characterizations of managers within the critical management studies movement. We have mentioned the complex nature of the manager-educator relationship, and proposed explanations for educators' aloofness from managers in their respective socio-cultural locations.

In the same way that managers are seen to be negotiating meaning within their workplaces, viewing the manager-educator relationship as a set of overlapping dialogues, reconceptualizes the relationship as a less hierarchical one. The educator is no longer the sole creator of a knowledge that is imparted in an 'ex-cathedra' fashion within the hallowed halls of academia or from library shelves. Rather, educators through their research and teaching acknowledge that managers' expertise and meaning-making is crucial to their own claims to knowledge.

Managers, Educators and Managing Meaning

Management education has not always seemed a natural - or even welcome - member of the academic community. The picture is further complicated in that while the unquestioning provision of a purely technical service is unacceptable to academics of a critical persuasion, critical perspectives themselves are not without contention. Nevertheless, there is a strong argument for the proposition that a site for a critically robust inquiry into the processes and consequences of managing is necessary. Intellectual detachment is not an option. As Anthony (1986) has pointed out:

No account, right, left, or centre, fails to conclude that managers are one of the 'central characters of our time', influential over the lives of others, far reaching in the decisions they take, casting in hegemonic mould the way that we think of the purpose and policies of manufacturing industry, retail, health care, broadcasting, education, and welfare' (p. 195).

As Danieli and Thomas (1999) ask in their study of management educators, of their work and assessment of the current and likely future state of management education: 'if managers and managerial work are indeed of central importance to society and to management education, can it be that management educators and their work are not?' (p.451).

In previous sections we hope to have demonstrated that the development of management education should be based on academics forming a more grounded of managerial work, one which is seen as embedded within 'the social relationships that they construct and reconstruct in their attempt to forge order out of chaos' (Reed and Anthony, 1992: 601). Engaged in these processes, managers construct, draw on and reconstruct 'lay theories', developing the thinking 'which actually and potentially informs their actions' (Watson, 1996b: 339).

Such portrayals of managerial activity resonate with Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual. To characterize managers as theorising about and acting towards complex moral and social processes calls for an educational approach which is more demanding than a portfolio limited to skills and techniques. As Thomas and Anthony (1996) write, 'real management.... engages social, political and conceptual abilities that are far beyond the reach of the current battery of analytical techniques' (p.32). Indeed, as Anthony (1986) observed earlier, if managers seem averse to more demanding, specifically critical perspectives it is because they may have learned that frame of mind in business schools. Grey's position is that the educator's task should be to assist managers in resisting 'conformity to managerial and organizational orthodoxies' (Grey, 1997: 722).

If we accept the proposition that the more usual characterization of manager-educator relations should be revised, there is a case for proposing that as management educators we become more reflexive about the production and reproduction of our own practices. From the accounts we have discussed so far we have seen an acknowledgement that management education has hitherto not challenged the social organization of its own knowledge. Knowledge appears to remain the sole creation of educators; revealing an 'ex-cathedra' approach in which educators are expert and the practitioners merely vessels for the receipt of their rigorously researched knowledge.

The question for educators in the light of the characterization we have offered based on Gramsci's ideas is what role for themselves and what approach to manager-educator relations is appropriate? As important is the need to question how we 'treat' knowledge. The critical movement in management studies is concerned to challenge the dominance of mainstream managerialist knowledge, but equally it should encourage reflexive awareness of aspects of management education and the academics role which otherwise remain unnoticed. Gramsci's analysis, with its dialogical perspective on meaning creation and his account of subjectivity, demonstrates that knowledge, as a feature of intellectual activity, is not the preserve of a select group within society.

According to Thomas and Anthony (1996) a prescriptive theory of management has developed that is 'at odds with praxis and divorced from reality' (ibid: 32). This separation of theory and practice leads to a division between educators and practitioners which 'finally widens to the point at which the arrogance of the former is reinforced by the avoidance of contact, not only with management practice, but with managers' (ibid). To alleviate this condition requires educators to research more effectively the environments in which managers practice their art. How this research might be conducted in terms of the methodologies used, is not made clear by Thomas and Anthony but there seems a danger within current educator-manager relationships that research practices will continue to be monologic in character, where the voice of authority continues to lie with the researcher. Managers continue to be objects of knowledge, rather than co-creators of it, leading to the perpetuation of legislative approaches to its construction and dissemination. In short, we may find ourselves swapping one position of governance (that of mainstream management education) with another (*critical* management education).

A further implications of Gramsci's work is in situating authority for management ideas with managers and this too has implications for academics. So we can say that practitioners' knowledge, in its broadest sense, needs to be acknowledged by educators and that management education cannot remain a one-way process in which educators transmit *their* understanding to an audience presumed to be uninformed. While educators may have distinct areas of expertise to bring to the dialogue, practitioners possess understanding developed and refined through reflection-in-action.

Implications for Management Academics

Anthony's (1998) argument is that if academics learned more about managerial work and its lived complexities they would be less likely to perpetrate 'the tedious and impractical business of moralizing and preaching' (p. 278). Watson (1996a) takes a similar position

in stressing the importance for educators to learn about and understand how managers make sense of their practical experience. The importance of these prescriptions is in redefining the academic's role so as to stress the importance for them of achieving understanding through sympathetic inquiry into managers' work. The relations implied here are engaged rather than distant, and supportively critical rather than morally or intellectually superior. This is a tough one for academics. As Chia and Morgan (1996) have observed in their argument for 'theoretical pluralism', in a context where the agendas of academics override the educational concerns of students,

it remains unclear to the seriously committed management educator what his/her pedagogical priorities ought to be and what theoretical agendas he/she should be working towards in order to remain constructive and emancipatory yet still visibly relevant and without appearing overly dogmatic (p.39).

Roberts (1996) contends that one reason for the transmission of knowledge as fact is that it affords security to the educator faced with students who may in fact 'know' more than they do. Roberts here appears to acknowledge practitioners' role as intellectuals in Gramsci's conception, as well as foregrounding possible insecurities for management educators.

The challenge is for educators to provide critique with support, provocation without a patronizing sense of moral superiority, as they work with managers' experience of the disparities of which their roles consist. It is the issue of distance that seems to us to provide the more obstinate barrier to such a relationship. In his analysis of mutual castigation and scapegoating between managers and academics in terms of constructed identities, Lilley (1997) notes that

[carefully managed] attacks across the divide are required to maintain both the divide and the integrity of those who wish to see themselves on one side or the other. (p. 56)

Wood and Kelly (1978) had forewarned of the danger of constructing 'an amoral, highly scholastic body of thought consisting of little more than a set of abstract concepts' which would generate distance by inviting 'the tendency to dismiss it' (p. 19). And as Fournier and Grey (2000) have observed more recently, 'for some, CMS is in danger of disengaging itself from management and organizational practices, of becoming a forum for the exercise of academic indulgence' (p. 22).

Within a more engaged, less hierarchical system of relations, ideally devoid of moral superiority, what sense of purpose and what methods would seem appropriate? In short, what difference in practice should adopting a Gramscian perspective make? For managers in this conception their mode of practice is one that involves negotiating meaning at the boundaries between conflicting influences. We see as inherent to this construction of 'boundary managers' the notion of dialogue through which forms of knowledge are created in relation to organizational work. If we acknowledge the production of management knowledge as a dialogical process, then we need to move away from a legislative approach to knowledge where the educator judges what knowledge is key.

The sense of academic purpose which seems fit for this perspective is proposed by Reed and Anthony (1992) view of the 'crucial assistance' managers might expect from their education, helping them to 'to an awareness of their own significance and responsibility' (p.609), and which

must help them in preparing to cope with the contradictory pressures and conflicting priorities which they will inevitably confront as professionals working within, and to some extent on, complex organizations (p. 609).

At the same time, as Grey and Mitev (1995) advocate, a management educator's responsibility is to ask 'serious, critical questions' (p. 86) underlining the point that challenge or confrontation do not depend on a hierarchical system of relations, but can be no less effective as between friends or colleagues. Thus the purpose for the educator is no longer limited to authoritatively disseminating ideas and theory but the 'intellectual and emotional preparation for the *adventures of life* beyond the cloistered boundaries of academia' (Chia and Morgan, 1996: 58, original emphasis).

To accomplish this educators may characterize themselves, as did one of Danieli and Thomas's educators, as an 'access route' to ideas which managers could apply to their professional experiences (1999: 462). Just as much a part of this concept of the educator role is to pass on a mode of critical enquiry which helps managers judge for themselves the worth and applicability of theories they encounter (Watson, 1996a). Elsewhere Watson (1999) describes working towards 'the ideal of achieving a negotiated narrative between learners and management academics' (p. 5) which emphasizes learning as a social process in which theories develop out of the *discussions between* managers and academics and not imported into them unilaterally.

There are accounts of educational method which could be expected to support dialogue and knowledge creation of this nature, as for example can be found in Pedler's (1997) or Willmott's (1997a) recent interpretations of 'action learning'. In the context of this paper however we have been more preoccupied with how educators characterize their sense of role and of purpose within their relations with managers. Suffice to say that methods such as action learning are potentially appropriate because they are founded on the intention to disrupt the traditional authoritarianism that characterizes educational process.

Conclusion

Our paper is intended as a response to concerns that critical management studies is based on a fundamental hostility to managers, betraying an intention 'to discomfort and undermine rather than to facilitate understanding and performance (Thomas and Anthony, 1996 p. 29). We have argued that while there is evidence for an anti-management stance there is a group of 'critical' management educators who are more supportively inclined, having a preoccupation with the complexity and contradiction inherent in the manager's role. More generally, the wrath of the critical community is reserved for 'mainstream' management educators whose function is seen as limited to the dissemination of techniques and the 'false and morally bankrupt perversion of management practice that it has so assiduously peddled' (Anthony, 1995 , p.295 quoted in Grey, 1996) - although even that position has been questioned within the critical movement in favour of some form of 'rapprochement' between critical and orthodox academics (Grey, 1996).

Anthony's (1998) proposition is that rather than being 'cast as the enemies of morality' managers should be viewed as 'moral agents' (p. 269) whose authority should be based on understanding and responsibility, 'a requirement that becomes the more urgent as the power of management increases (p270). Similarly, in their extensive analysis of the dilemmas involved in the manager-educator relationship and the differing positions within the critical movement, Fournier and Grey (2000) summarise the position developed in this paper as one which promotes a more humane interpretation of management rather than one based on 'more or less complete disengagement with managerial practice' (p. 24). Their description of the approach we have described is as one which "is not 'anti-management' but rather aims to transform it, to promote less irrational and socially divisive forms of management theories and practices' (p. 23).

It is now a decade since Reed and Anthony wrote

.....any educational process must develop and encourage critical and sceptical responses the failure of management education to do so will contribute to its own redundancy (1992: 603).

The problem is that translating these principles into practice is likely to be an uphill struggle because of older traditions in academia which reinforce intellectual superiority and a suspicion of engaging with things managerial. Added to this is the more recent sense of moral superiority reinforced by some aspects of the critical movement amongst management academics emanating with a reasonable concern for management responsibility for ethical, ecological and social consequences and the implication of the function of management in contemporary society.

We have drawn on Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual in proposing a less hierarchical system of relations for managers and educators, one that emphasizes negotiated meaning rather than transmitted knowledge. This we have argued enables manager and educator to engage in critical dialogue which authors cited in this paper have proposed. We would contrast this approach with more familiar if flaccid alternatives to the traditional academic position such as 'facilitator'. At the same time we are aware of processes within academia we have not elaborated but which conspire to increase the gradient we referred to above. These processes include formal assessment of academic research and writing which make it even less likely that academics work will be accessible to more than the minority who share their language. No encouragement here to write expressly for a practitioner audience.

How much significance, in research or teaching, is attached to managers' lived experience and to the ways they theorize that experience in both its technical and moral aspects? What interpretations are implied in the ways management schools are structured and roles within them allocated between teaching and research? In what ways are manager-educator relations being defined and determined by the reward systems which govern academia? How often do academic management journals call on practitioner colleagues as referees?

‘Management education needs to be cognate, related to the reality and experience of managers while submitting it to critical examination of those best placed to conduct it: managers (Anthony, 1998: 279).

Resolving these questions is not helped by exaggerating the differences between managers and academics, particularly in perpetuating a spurious separation of theory and practice (Grey and Mitev, 1995). Academics manage too, and experience similar dilemmas when their social or educational values are in tension with economic or instrumental pressures to accumulate personal or institutional esteem.

Lilley (1997) comments that

although critical management researchers are adept at critiquing moves made by practising managers, they seem less keen to address the issues that they raise about others in relation to themselves (p. 51).

Nor is there much in the literature to suggest that academics – critical or otherwise – are interested in critiquing let alone dismantling the institutional procedures of assessment and accreditation on which their power in society depends. And if educational methods lag behind changes in content brought about from critical influences is not this because more traditional methods reinforce teachers’ authority as traditionally interpreted? As Hollway (1991) observed, academic institutions are not noted for their reflexivity. Anthony has argued strongly for a re-evaluation of management education if it is to be established as a ‘reputable activity’. We would add that any re-evaluation might involve reflexive application of the critical perspectives currently – but unilaterally – applied to management.

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ⁱ The critical movement in management studies is often – and therefore in this paper – abbreviated to 'CMS'. We would emphasize that there are management academics who write, teach and research from a critical perspective who would not necessarily think of themselves as members of any 'movement'. We hope that this distinction, which being as much social as substantive, is difficult to be precise about, is drawn as clearly as possible within the paper.

ⁱⁱ For a more extensive analysis of different perspectives on 'management' within the Critical Management Studies community, their conceptual foundations (Labour Process Theory, Critical Theory etc.) and the political significance of their expression as engagement with or disengagement from, the management profession, see Fournier and Grey, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ In some ways it seems that in the same way managers in the early 20th century separated task from process, extending their authority over knowledge creation, management educators have until recently applied a Fordist approach to knowledge in relation to managers. Both seem at odds with Gramsci's conception of the processes engaged in by organic intellectuals.