CRITICAL PEDAGOGY: REFLEXIVE DIALOGICAL PRACTICE IN MANAGEMENT

LEARNING

Stream: Management Education and Learning

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ABSTRACT
Recent criticisms of management education have raised the need for a critical pedagogy in Management Studies but have rarely evaluated the possible implications for learning processes. Drawing from critical and social constructionist perspectives, I propose we need to develop a reflexive dialogical practice in management learning and explore what that practice may incorporate. Specifically, I construct learning as reflective/reflexive conversations in which participants connect tacit knowing and explicit knowledge. From this perspective, both educators and learners need to take a critical view of their dialogical practices and what may constitute ‘good’ learning conversations. I include examples from my attempts to incorporate this approach in my own teaching practices.

Criticisms of management education often address the consequences of its emphasis on a normative approach to learning (Roberts, 1996). Many authors argue that by advocating the systematic application of theory and techniques to every situation, traditional approaches to management education fail to consider that practitioners deal with ill-defined, unique, emotive and complex issues. As a result, management education does not deliver what it promises, nor does it help society solve its problems (Schon, 1983: 39). Recently, authors have drawn on the modern/postmodern debate to raise important questions about epistemology and pedagogy (French & Grey, 1996; Giroux, 1988). They suggest a need to develop a critical pedagogy which may take the form of a critique of management ideology (Knights, 1992), a critical philosophy (Grey, Knights & Willmott, 1996), a critical interpretation of substantive issues such as organization culture (Carter and Jackson, 1993, Kreiner, 1992), or developing the critical thinking skills of students (Chia & Morgan, 1996). While these approaches open up traditional pedagogy and teaching to critical questioning, I suggest they focus on intellectual critiques and do not help us cope with more informal, everyday ways of sense making and learning that are the essence of practice. Drawing on social
constructionist suppositions, I rework learning as an embodied, relational-responsive process in which we are “struck” (Goethe, 1998; Wittgenstein, 1980) and moved to change our ways of being, talking and acting. From this perspective, we try to make sense of experience within our everyday conversations. This is not simply a question of thinking about new teaching techniques but involves rethinking our notions of learning, learning conversations, identity and student-teacher power relations.

By reframing management learning as a reflexive dialogical practice in which the micropractices or 'taken-for-granted' aspects of teaching are elevated, a central question emerges:

*How can management educators and students, as practical co-constructors of the learning process, develop new forms of reflexive talk and practice?*

I explore two major implications: first, social constructionism means reworking learning from a cognitive to a dialogical process. I propose a way of thinking about learning from this perspective and suggest it involves constructing “practical theories” (Shotter, 1993), ways of accounting for and shaping our experiences which help reveal aspects of our tacit, embodied knowing. Second, I explore how we may construct dialogical opportunities for learning by incorporating a practical reflexivity in our learning conversations. Specifically, this means developing a reflexive awareness of the poetic, embodied and responsive nature of our everyday ways of talking as management educators and learners. I propose a way of viewing this process through the notion of reflex, reflective and reflexive dialogue. In explicating this argument, I will draw on research conversations with managers' and offer examples from my own attempts to incorporate this approach within my teaching. These conversations were formative in my reframing of the learning process. The excerpts offer moments which began my process of reshaping my teaching and learning discourse.

**THE NEED FOR REFLEXIVE DIALOGICAL PRACTICE IN MANAGEMENT LEARNING**

"Why do we think that the best way to make sense of our lives and to act for the best is in terms of theoretical formulations provided us by experts (rather than in terms of more practical, everyday forms of knowledge)?" (Shotter, 1993: 19)
In this section, I propose to establish a need for reflexive dialogical learning in management education by contrasting current ideas in critical management studies with the presuppositions of this paper. In doing so, I will give excerpts from research conversations with managers about their own learning and development experiences.

Conventional approaches to learning advocate the teaching of management theory and techniques to develop managers-as-scientists: someone who formulates a theory and then tests it in action (Holman, Pavlica & Thorpe, 1997). Such approaches have been criticized for bearing little relationship to the experiences of managers (Argyris, 1983; Schon, 1983; Vaill, 1989; Whetton and Cameron, 1983) and a failure to recognize that competent practitioners often rely on a tacit knowing-in-action to help them act within circumstances (Polanyi, 1966).

Recent criticisms of traditional management education draw on the modern/postmodern debate to raise important questions about the nature of management, management knowledge and the impact on management education. Giroux (1988: 25), for example, has summarized the main impact of postmodernism as raising important questions about how narratives embody political and epistemological suppositions which, through educational practices, regulate social experience. These practices may result in educators imposing their monological view of one story and one way (Boje, 1995: 1029). For example, organizations are said to have specific system characteristics and ‘good’ managers engage in rational, goal-oriented behavior. These ideals then form the basis for the content of management education programs. Within Management and Organization Studies these ideas are reflected in the discourse of critical management which, broadly speaking, advocates a reflexive questioning of the assumptions underlying the production and dissemination of knowledge. Some authors suggest we need to be critical of management (Boje & Dennehy 1992; Grey, Knights & Willmott, 1996), others that we need to develop critical skills within management (Chia & Morgan, 1996), or both (Caproni & Arias, 1997). I will briefly summarize the main critical approaches as a springboard for developing the need to link some of these ideas to helping students of management develop more reflexive dialogical practices.

Authors concerned with criticisms of management draw on critical theory to study management as a field
of domination and conflict. They question the legitimacy of management and its social, political, and moral
effect on the labor process and our ways of life (Grey & French, 1996: 6). Many suggest we need to
incorporate critical theory and multiple perspectives in management education because management plays
an important role on social practices. This approach exposes students to ideological issues by encouraging
them to question notions of societal domination and organizational reality (what is it and who creates it) by
exploring different texts and voices (Calas & Smircich, 1992); questioning authorship (Cavanaugh &
Prasad, 1996); redrawing boundaries of power and organizational/cultural narratives (Giroux, 1988;
Prasad & Cavanaugh, 1997; Mumby, 1988); and deconstructing and transforming traditional
organizational studies (Cooper, 1990; Kreiner, 1992). Students often address philosophical issues and a
variety of texts as they compare different ways of framing management and organizations.

The second approach, criticism within management, also incorporates reflexive questioning but in
epistemological rather than ideological terms. This involves challenging conventional management
knowledge and theory, the design of management education and development programs, and the content of
these programs. Students may be encouraged to engage in a critical analysis of substantive issues and
theories within management and organization studies (Summers, Boje, Dennehy & Rosile, 1997). For
example, Carter and Jackson (1993: 99) argue Vroom’s Expectancy Theory, although within a scientific,
modernist frame, is “prototypically postmodern”, because it implies motivation is a fragmented and
subjective process in which workers desires are not necessarily congruent with management desires.
Schultz (1992) reworks organization culture as a process of seduction through aesthetics and illusion.
Thus, traditional theories of organizations can be deconstructed or undermined in favor of other critical or
‘postmodern’ ones. Essentially, this approach involves teaching critical reflexive analysis or the ability to
problemize assumptions and generate different perspectives.

In both of these approaches, knowledge is still regarded in an objective, abstract or analytical way -- a
criticism of some thing; theory, text, or process. By advocating a reflexive questioning of the nature of
knowledge, theory and reality and offering critical alternatives, knowledge and practice remain separate
because the focus lies on intellectual critique of rather than acting within circumstance. The impact on
management education is mainly an epistemological one as educators focus on developing “a critical
pedagogy of management” (Grey, Knights and Willmott, 1996: 95). I suggest that if we are to have any impact on management practice, we also need to focus on helping managers develop a critical practice from within experience. A third approach does offer a way of bridging the theory/practice gap by arguing that in order to work in a chaotic, uncertain and ‘postmodern’ world, managers need to utilize a postmodern stance. Authors writing from this perspective focus on developing critical thinking skills of students (Caproni & Arias, 1997; Chia & Morgan, 1996). Chia and Morgan for example, call for a pedagogy based on a cultivation of “negative capability” (1996, 39) in which we remain open to the uncertain, emerging nature of the social world and the role we play in constructing the very realities we accept as being already there. This may be achieved by helping managers to develop critical thinking skills so they may question their own ways of making sense of the world.

All three approaches require rethinking educational philosophy and practice at all levels of the education system. This is not an easy task. In the US, few Ph.D. or Masters programs incorporate either critical theory or critical thinking (Cavanaugh and Prasad, 1996: 77) and those faculty who take a critical perspective are often subject to a “shoot-the-messenger hegemony” (Dehler, Welsh & Lewis, 1999). An essential first step in developing critical pedagogy is a fundamental shift in the ways in which faculty think about the knowledge they disseminate and the cultivation and encouragement of a critical stance. However, critical stances alone do not go far enough in helping managers and students talk or act in more reflexive ways. While they may open up conventional forms of inquiry and teaching to critical questioning and help us teach management in a critical way, how do they help managers act within their everyday experience in more critical ways? I will briefly summarize my concerns about both traditional and many critical approaches before moving on to propose the need for a reflexive dialogical practice. These concerns relate to differences between the discourse of management education and practice and secondly to our understanding of learning as a cognitive, disembodied, reflective process. I suggest both result in an objectification of experience which leads to the further separation of theory and practice.

The discourse of management education and management practice is very different. As academics, we talk about ideologies, social structures and systems of domination which are generalized across different organizational and management contexts. We speak about things we can transform if we apply critical
reasoning to our understanding and our action. However, the managers in my study rarely spoke in ideological or critical ways about their actions. Rather they spoke in practical terms about relational issues: what they did, who said/did what to whom and how they felt about that. They spoke in the everyday language of participants within the situation; about ‘grappling with stuff’ and ‘railroad trains’ hitting them. One manager described a project in which she was responsible for coordinating the relocation of a number of different departments. She described the decision making process in which, on paper, an Executive Committee had the formal decision making authority, however:

L : People refuse to give authority to that group and because it’s a peer relationship it’s pretty easy for them to do that ...... It’s no accident there are three of them on this issue because it’s not something one person can work. I think part of it is that if they are going to get beat up they want three of them in there saying, ‘we decided this!’

Managers frequently utilize more informal and often taken-for-granted ways of sense making which draw on the flow of their everyday activity. In other words, they develop their own ways of making sense of situations from within the activity itself. Whereas on the one hand we may claim decontextualized theoretical or critical discourse is essential to understanding and acting in more effective ways -- on the other hand, managers make sense of their actions in more practical and responsive ways. Critical management education may encourage L to deconstruct power and authority relationships and help her reframe the situation from different perspectives retrospectively. However, it may not help her converse or construct different ‘realities’ in the moment of acting which is often responsive and unselfconscious; we draw on everyday language, and respond to our sense and feelings in-the-moment. This sense making dialogue draws on a tacit knowing we may not be able to articulate because it is deep within us. I suggest critical management programs needs to combine both an intellectual critique and a recognition of everyday ways of talking and relating in lived experience.

The separation of theory and practice is reinforced in our understanding of learning. Traditionally, learning is seen as a process which takes place inside the head: a disembodied intellectual activity in which mind and body, intellect and emotion, thinking and acting are separate (Fox, 1998). Managers rarely exist in an intellectual vacuum devoid of emotion. One manager explained to me:

P : There’s a tremendous amount of helplessness in this job. Sometimes I find it easier to feel guilty than I do to feel helpless, so that’s what I’ll do and I think the people who have been in these jobs have clearly learned to cope with this.
She emphasizes the need to learn how to deal with the tensions she experiences: the feelings of guilt and helplessness. Such issues are generally not covered in conventional or critical-based management pedagogies which bypass subjective feelings for more objective, factual, or philosophical issues. The implicit message is that it is ‘not OK’ to be emotional about issues and these feelings tend to be suppressed under a facade of rationality or criticality rather than being brought out into the open. This view elevates the cognitive aspects of learning in which individuals are seen to think then act. Many learning models assume we learn in structured and sequential ways (Kolb, 1984) and that learning is under our conscious control when in practice it is not always so (Burgoyne, 1992: 43). An academically constructed logic and language (theory about practice) is not the only way of making sense of experience. I suggest we make sense as we respond to others in the moment of conversation and that emotions often trigger new ways of being and relating as we engage with the possibilities of the situation. If so, how can we incorporate these issues into the learning process?

I suggest we need to recognize critical management suppositions and reframe them in the context of everyday, lived experience and our ideas about learning. Critical theory draws on social constructionist suppositions that we construct social realities between us in our interactions (Prasad & Caproni, 1997). From this perspective, organizational realities and identities are interwoven in a continuous process of mutual construction (Shotter, 1993); we co-construct our realities in our conversations. Our knowledge of the world is also constructed through our interaction because we make sense of what is happening around us as we talk. This understanding is never complete because it emerges in the spontaneous, taken-for-granted, subjective un/conscious ways in which we respond to others. If we accept this possibility, then we need to develop more critical, reflexive dialogical practices.

Essentially, reflexive dialogical practice means reworking knowledge as “knowing-from-within”, where we grasp a sense of our situation in what we do and say (Shotter, 1993:18). It is in our talk rather than in our minds that we try to order and make sense of our actions and experience. Learning may therefore be reframed as an embodied, relational-responsive understanding in which we are “struck” (Wittgenstein 1980: 85) and moved to change our ways of talking and acting: an embodied rather than purely cognitive
understanding. A quote from a student about a professor (Carson, 1996: 13) illustrates the nature of this wholistic experience:

“You felt his joy, you believed in his commitment to the subject because it was manifested in the very air of the classroom .... After this class I was frequently exhausted and exhilarated by the energy of both the ideas and the expression of those ideas....”

The student was ‘struck by’ and responded to many aspects of the class; ideas, the teacher, energy, the air, the conversation.... all of which impacted the way s/he felt. In this sense learning was experienced as an embodied process.

The process of being ‘struck’ may be central to reflexive practice because it can be the impetus for capturing the active and emerging nature of learning. Goethe also envisions learning beginning in this way, with an “aperçu” or impression that acts as an anticipatory event “one does not get rid of (it) till one has fought the disease through” (quoted in Shotter, 1999). This moment of being struck may cause us to question our ways of acting and responding and open us to possibilities and new ways of talking and acting. In fighting ‘the disease through’ we may be making new connections between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge and constructing our sense of situations in ways not visible to us previously. From this perspective, reflexive dialogue is an essential part of the sense making and learning process.

In Figure 1, I suggest possible ways in which this embodied and relational learning may occur. I propose that between tacit knowing (everyday talk and embodied actions) and explicit knowledge (theoretical forms of talk) is an area of ‘muddy water’ that creates a space in which possibilities for learning from within and constructing new understandings open up. How we react to these possibilities may differ and may be influenced by our opportunities for reflexive dialogue. The muddy water may become muddier, clearer, or form a layer of sedimentation in which we find ourselves stuck with particular ways of talking or acting. However, our aperçu or moment in which we are struck offers a trigger for clearing the muddy water because it is where we may begin to connect our tacit and explicit knowing in our dialogical learning practice.

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Insert Figure 1 about here.
a) We may be struck in an embodied, tacit way then draw on tacit and/or explicit knowledge and use practical and/or theoretical ways of talking to help us construct order and account for our experience. This may involve learning and making sense of our reflex actions by linking theory and practice in reflective dialogue with self or others. On page 14 I offer an example of how a strong feeling or embodied response provided an opportunity to reflect and connect elements of explicit knowledge and practical theories.

b) We may be struck in theoretical talk (explicit knowledge) and connect this retrospectively with tacit ways of being and acting. This way of connecting is probably the one implicit in most educational practices, because it is based on the assumption that theory provides insight into practice. For example, one manager in my study spoke of how he got ideas from training courses and books:

R : If I look back there are probably six or seven different techniques I’ve picked up .. that I’ve applied. Some successfully and some unsuccessfully .. and I think I’ve probably never taken everything I’ve learned from class and applied it -- it’s always been I learned ten things and came back and applied two. Picking the right two is what determines how successful you are, I guess.

In this way, theoretical forms of talk are used to develop new ways of talking and acting in our everyday experience. Central to this form of learning is reflective dialogue; reflecting upon situations we may have experienced and using explicit knowledge to draw out actions based on tacit knowing. For example, Morgan (1986) suggests the use of metaphors as devices for critique. Managers may use metaphors as a tool to analyze established organizational practices, become more critical of these, and create new metaphors to change ways of talking and acting.

c) We may be stuck in the muddy water asking ourselves why we (or others) act or feel the way we do and yet we may not have the language to make sense of this. We may feel we are constantly wrestling at the boundaries of connecting and disconnecting because we cannot grasp the totality of the situation (Lyotard, 1984: 78), nor do we know how to make sense or act. As one Production Manager in my study said:

D : Everything can be done better and faster ....... it’s hard because you have three or four things thrown at you and it’s hard to focus on one -- you’ve gotta make yourself focus on two or three and sometimes the results are not that good ... I have to process multiple things.

The analogy of a mosaic picture is useful here: if we stand back from the mosaic we get a sense of the whole but cannot see the detail, if we move up close to grasp the detail we see individual tiles and colors but cannot grasp the whole. The experience moves in and out of focus. We may feel there are
possibilities, we may face dilemmas, but we do not have the language, knowledge or ability to make sense of our experience.

d) We may be struck and react in spontaneous ways which may incorporate a set of assumptions, ways of seeing the world, and ways of acting which we do not or cannot question. In this sense, knowing is essentially impressionistic, incomplete, and involves a tacit sensing we may be unable to articulate; thus we may act in unselfconscious ways. Further dialogue may influence us in ways of which we are unaware. A manager I spoke with offered a good example of this - of how someone’s ‘emotional loading’ may influence his/her reactions:

M : Out of the values and experiences that we as managers have, someone comes up to us and says, ‘the union steward wants to send people home early today’ ‘No!’ ... before the person has a chance to say, ‘because there’s a flood on the floor and it’s dangerous’.
It’s a real quick dash into experience ... an instantaneous decision on action is made and you dash back out I think that’s what the manager who is saying ‘no’ to the shop steward is doing. He’s saying, ‘I’ve been down that road before, you know, the union’s taking advantage of me’.

e) We may be struck momentarily, experience an instinctive or intuitive ‘aha’, and the impression is lost and we think of it no further.

How or why we may reflect on some moments and not others may have something to do with the extent to which we are ‘struck’, our ability to language our experience, and our opportunity to create or participate in reflective and reflexive dialogue. How many times have we heard students say that they forgot the course material as soon as they finished the exam? I suggest that this may be because the material did not resonate with them. In other words, they did not make embodied connections between their everyday tacit experience and explicit knowledge. Our teaching practices often do not encourage this connecting process because we focus on cognitive rather than affective aspects (Baker & Kolb, 1993: 25). If learning is reframed as an embodied process of being struck -- of learning from within -- then the learning process may be seen as a discursive, contextualized and ongoing practice constructed in the moment. It becomes part of our ways of being, of responsive and embodied discourse rather than disembodied intellect. This perspective means focusing on dialogical aspects of the learning process, rather than just management ideologies, techniques and theory. It is through dialogue that we talk the “imaginary” into the “imagined” (Shotter, 1993: 88-93); a central notion in social constructionism because this provides a way of understanding how we construct our social realities. The imaginary lies within the internal relations of our
experience, perhaps an apercu which is not yet shared as an ongoing languaged activity (the imagined). Learning conversations offer a way in which we may create the imagined from the imaginary; a way of constructing practical theories (see Figure 1).

I am not advocating throwing the baby out with the bath water and getting rid of all theory, but suggesting management education needs to incorporate both a critical, reflexive stance towards ideologies and management strategies AND a relational-responsive stance in which we develop a reflexive awareness of our everyday ways of talking and their embodied and responsive nature. The latter is fundamental to making sense and constructing the ‘realities’ we experience. The former may take an objective approach by focusing on unsettling management ideologies, functions, theories, or skills. The latter is concerned with more active aspects of management learning in which reflexive dialogical practice helps us become aware of our “practical theories” (Shotter, 1993) or ways of shaping and accounting for our experiences from within. Questioning our practical theories may help reveal aspects of our situated, embodied knowing. These are not scientific, rational or theoretical way of ordering, but ways of accounting and talking about how we make connections with self, others and our social landscape. Practical theories may also include talk of traditional theory. Instead of viewing academic and management language as mutually exclusive, or one having predominance over the other, they may be mutually defining as each may construct the other.

The impact of this approach on management learning, is that the focus shifts from a theoretical talking about practice, to a dialogical, responsive talking in practice. By embracing this dialogical view of sense making, the ways in which managers, students, and management educators talk becomes a creative force in learning. I argue that this tends to be a taken-for-granted aspect of the practice of conventional and critical management educators who talk about or of theory. In the following section, I will explore some of the possibilities this raises for management learning.

**MANAGEMENT LEARNING: A REFLEXIVE DIALOGICAL PRACTICE**

Previously, I argued the need for a critical intellectual and a practical dialogical reflexivity in which we question and surface taken-for-granted aspects of our everyday experience. Cavanaugh and Prasad argue
that the reflexive project in critical management education centers around the question:

“How, in other words, do we teach the perspective that thought is a product?” (1996: 83).

I propose that to enact this in the learning process we need to extend the question:

... and how can 'educators' and 'students' as co-constructors of the learning process develop new forms of reflexive talk both about and within practice?

In situating reflexivity as a dialogical practice, we need to take a “radically reflexive” stance (Pollner, 1991: 374) in which we recognize our own place as educators and managers in the process of constructing sense, learning and organizational ‘realities’. This means focusing on the micropractices of teaching and learning. It is through our interaction and conversations with students and through our embodied reactions that they (and we) may be ‘struck’ and experience different ways of talking and acting in both our intellectual and everyday practices. I suggest reflexive dialogical practice involves at least three issues: recognizing that educators and learners are “practical authors” (Shotter, 1993) in the learning process, constructing dialogical opportunities for learning, and incorporating a practical reflexivity in learning conversations. I will explore the implications of practical reflexivity and what reflexive dialogical practice may look like by incorporating comments from managers in my study and examples from my attempts to develop these new ways of talking and learning in my own teaching practices.

**Our Notion of Identity: Educators and Learners As Practical Authors**

“The basic practical-moral problem in life is not what to do but what to be.” (Shotter, 1993: 118)

Social constructionist suppositions reframe knowledge from cognitive-representational to a relational-responsive knowing. This results in a fundamental shift in our view of the nature of learning, pedagogy, and most importantly, of our selves as teachers/students. This is not simply a question of thinking of new teaching techniques to use, but requires questioning what it means to be an educator. We become “practical authors” (Shotter, 1993) of our own experiences and knowledge as we continually create self, others, and a sense of what is happening around us in our everyday conversations. We therefore need to understand how we may construct our sense of reality in more critical and deliberate ways. This means faculty and students acting as practical co-authors of understanding in this relational-responsive learning process. What are the implications of this for teaching?
I propose that initially, this approach involves rethinking our notions of identity and student-teacher power relations. Within traditional classical and scientific management approaches, the manager/teacher is expert and power relations are based on control by the person in authority (Chia, 1992: 14). However, from the perspective of relational-responsive understanding, learning is seen as a rhetorical-responsive activity in which teachers and learners are participants and practical co-authors in the creative dialogical process of learning. Specifically, notions of symmetry and joint action become key as teacher-student power relations are repositioned from that of expert/learner (where the expert believes in his/her legitimacy to impose his/her views) to that of co-authorship or a shared responsibility for constructing learning. This means not only talking about co-authorship to students, but incorporating it within our dialogical practices with students. In this way we can construct an understanding that we are co-authors within a learning experience. Practical theories may be created between teacher and students in their dialogue as they try to construct a sense of the situation. Such practical theories are articulation of our sense making. The view that students need to feel themselves as practical authors and experience the active part they play in the emerging dialogical activity of learning, is supported by Bickford and Van Vleck who argue learners are engaged when “they sense that they are collaboratively shaping something unique as they interact” (1997: 17). This approach to learning incorporates an often tacit, dialogical process in which the boundaries of teacher and student are blurred.

Within this co-authorship, teacher and student may have to cross the boundaries of academic and management (everyday) language or “speech genres” (Bakhtin, 1986: 95). The former may involve reflecting on knowledge, theory and self, while the latter may be more practical and grounded in everyday activity (page 5). In this sense, learning may be seen as ways in which we make connections and create possible shared meanings between us within our dialogue; being struck and engaging with ‘material’ in an embodied way rather than recalling and analyzing information. This engaging is intertextual in that it may initially be an impression or sense of a whole - a reflex response of there being something important to pursue. By recognizing our authorship we can try to make sense of our reflex activity and construct accounts or practical theories through reflective and reflexive dialogical learning practices. I suggest that as teachers we often take this for granted and focus on the content of our courses rather than our ways of
relating and talking. We tend to ignore the micropractices of authorship and its shared, responsive nature. Baker and Kolb (1993: 26) contrast the typical approach to learning, the “outside-in approach which leaves human affairs to the experts”, to the “inside-out perspective, which is rooted in our personal experience”. They argue the latter is more effective in valuing diversity in organizations, a view I extend to sharing authorship in learning conversations.

Elevating shared practical authorship does not mean abrogating responsibility for the learning process, it does mean understanding we are collaborators (and learners ourselves) in conversations in which everything is prospective learning. This form of learning focuses on how we may find more potent ways of connecting with students and connecting students with course material in ordinary conversation. This raises two important issues: can we as teachers create these moments in which we are 'struck' and the possibility for learning arises, and can we incorporate reflexive dialogue in learning situations? These are discussed in the following section.

**Constructing 'Dialogical Opportunities' for Learning: A Practical Reflexivity**

“Not what one man is doing now, but the whole hurly-burly, is the background against which we see an action, and it determines our judgment, our concepts, and our reactions” (Wittgenstein, 1980, II #629)

Can we create opportunities for being ‘struck’ as a basis for tapping into tacit, taken-for-granted aspects of everyday practices and connecting these with explicit knowledge? How might we articulate tacit knowing or those previously unnoticed features of our interaction and learning? Can we help students develop more self-conscious ways of constructing practical theories? I suggest we can create ‘reflexive dialogical opportunities’ by encouraging students to recognize their own authorship. This involves emphasizing a reflective and reflexive process in the course, constructing dialogical opportunities for learning, and helping students recognize and learn from those moments in which they may be struck.

*Emphasizing reflexive learning.* I emphasize this process in my undergraduate and graduate Organizational Behavior courses by highlighting two main underlying threads: practical authorship and reflective/reflexive dialogue. I begin by talking them through the notions of practical authorship and at the graduate level I also discuss the underlying suppositions. I emphasize the relational-responsive aspect of
interaction by suggesting we may view our conversations as a Reflex-Reflective-Reflexive process.

Reflex interaction refers to the instantaneous, unselfconscious, reacting in-the-moment dialogue that characterizes much of our experience. Much of our conversation is not planned to the last detail but is responsive to the other participants; sensing and drawing intuitively on our tacit knowing. This is not a deliberate process but acting out of instinct or habit which is linked to some past experience or memory. In this sense, reflex action is primitive because it is pre-ordering, a state of unawareness connected with an image or emotion. In the previous example of the manager and the union steward, the “No!” is the reflex response. By itself, reflex action may be an embodied response only or a moment in which we are ‘struck’ and no more (Figure 1, d). Our learning depends on our ability to take this further and reflect on or in the process (Fig. 1, a, b). We fold our arms a specific way by habit (reflex), when we have to fold them the opposite way we really have to think about (reflect on) the process and the outcome is not always comfortable. This discomfort often leads to ‘working through the disease’.

Reflection is traditionally defined as a mirror image, an accurate representation of some object or external reality. Reflective thinking is often seen to be a logical, objective and analytical process where we attempt to make sense of experience by using theory (Bailey, Saparito, Kressel, Christensen & Hooijberg, 1997). From a social constructionist perspective, reflection does not only involve intellectualizing the past but also creating order and shared meaning in our conversations (Weick, 1995). I suggest reflective conversations are a rhetorical process in which we try to connect with others and create a shared sense of our surroundings between us. In this way we may be trying to organize disorganized talk. Baker, Jensen and Kolb in their paper on transforming experience into learning, suggest reflective conversations incorporate “the active voice of speaking and the reflective voice of listening and of silence.” (1997: 6). One of the managers in my study talked about reflection:
L : My previous boss was a reflector, you would go in with a presentation and he would just play with his mustache ... he suggested rather than made a point, would ask a question, try to understand where people were coming from.

This type of conversation can be important in helping students deal with the moment in which they are struck but do not know how to explore the possibilities (Fig. 1, c) because reflective dialogue may incorporate rhetorical sense making devices. In this way, we may construct order or connections through theoretical/explicit as well as practical and tacit ways of talking. This type of dialogue may involve making sense in retrospect or in-the-moment if we are talking within the experience. *Talking about* case studies or a past experience involves retrospective reflection. In these conversations we often use explicit knowledge in the form of theory and models to give us the language to construct order. Below is an excerpt from a graduate student O. B. paper in which he reflects upon the experience of a group exam:

Personally, I entered the exam with a clear picture on how I viewed each individual’s role within the group. Likewise, I felt I had a grasp on each individual’s learning style, strengths and weaknesses. Following the model of my ‘band’, I assigned P and F as the two most visible members, similar to concrete experience learners described by Kolb. I envisioned A as a background member similar to a reflective observer learner. Reflecting back, I became aware that my initial analysis of each group member was inaccurate......

In order to initiate change I must take a “generative” role and interpret how I personally can enhance the effectiveness of the group through changes within myself. Specifically, I must increase my “arena”, giving informative feedback while increasing my “exposure” to the group (Hall, p.236).... I feel that declaring myself the manager could cause conflict within the group, so I will become a leader by example.

This is an example of Figure 1(b), where theory offers insight into practice and language is grounded in the academic ‘speech genre’. This way of writing about experience can disembodify the learning process because objective, rational and systematic ways of talking are elevated. I suggest that unless we engage with the content in an embodied way then reflective analysis will not necessarily impact *our way of being in the world or move us to talk in different ways*. Also, reflective conversations do not usually incorporate critical or radically reflexive stances because they objectivize learning as a given event rather than a way of being in the world. For example, students often say they need to act collaboratively in groups but talk about what ‘I’ am going to do to make the group collaborative - not recognizing the impact this language might have on their actions and the reactions of others. I offer two examples of this in the excerpts below and on page 19.

Reflexivity is generally viewed as a “turning back on oneself” (Lawson, 1985: 9) in which our ideas
about reality, truth and knowledge are open to question. Critical pedagogy usually incorporates this form of reflexive doubt. However, as previously suggested, this often leads to an intellectual rather than a practical reflexivity. In my MBA Organizational Behavior class we discuss social constructionist and traditional perspectives and compare articles from each. During the semester I introduce the notion of reflexive dialogical practice in which we question our ways of understanding, being and acting in the world, and encourage them to develop a reflexive awareness of their own suppositions and the impact on their learning. However, this usually has no personal meaning for students until I encourage them to incorporate reflexivity in group discussions and in personal papers about their own experiences. I offer an example from one student who captured the essence of recognizing the constitutive impact of dialogue and the need to engage in reflexive questioning. This is an example of Figure 1 (a) because we had a conversation immediately after the exam (the same exam, different group as the previous excerpt) in which he expressed his ‘disquiet’ that things had not gone well but wasn’t sure why. He wrote about his experience and how conversations prior to and during the exam may have impacted the result.

One example of using talk to “co-construct a ‘sense’ of situation” in our group is when K joked that she and B would simply let me write our paper by myself. We all laughed at her comment, but none of us, including myself, firmly addressed the significance of such a statement. As a result, there might have been a slight degree of “shared understanding” that I was going to shoulder a larger portion of the workload. Another dialogue that might have hurt our chances at producing a quality product was regarding the creation of our game plan for the exam. Because I was so controlling as to what we would do, when we would do it, and how much time we could afford to take, I was not recognizing in my talk the importance of their contribution to our group’s leadership. That was a mistake that surely contributed to our group’s leadership problems. Because I did not challenge the implied reality of these two dialogues, I also failed to challenge the associated consequences. As a result I was negotiating my way into the position of having too much of the leadership responsibility.

A third example of our group’s talk constructing our sense of our situation is my use of the words “Have Fun” (written at the top of the group’s game plan). Actually, as I considered earlier in this paper, this is probably an example of when talk is ‘mis-used’ and the outcome is a co-constructed reality that is not shared. Meaning that one portion of our group (K and B) believed our reality was one thing and the other portion (me) believed it was another. The challenging part is that neither is necessarily wrong, but rather there are simply two different realities.

This and the previous excerpt offer examples of Baker and Kolb’s (op cit.) distinction between outside-in and inside-out learning. In the first excerpt (pages 12-13) the student reflects upon the situation from the outside. The second student talks from within his experience and recognizes how dialogue and his unquestioned assumptions resulted in a less than acceptable situation. In contrast to the first example, this
student recognizes his own and other group members’ impact on the process of constructing ‘reality’; an example of both reflective and reflexive dialogue. Reflexive dialogue places each of us as practical authors and critical questioners within our social experiences. From a relational-responsive perspective, teaching can therefore be seen as creating opportunities for reflective and reflexive dialogue on reflex ways of being and acting. This notion provides a useful ‘practical theory’ or way of making sense of our practices. It offers a reflective and reflexive tool which, when linked with ‘dialogical opportunities’, can be a powerful trigger to learning.

Constructing ‘dialogical opportunities’ for learning. If we accept learning as a process of constructing and working through possibilities as a result of being struck, then stories can offer ‘dialogical opportunities’ for learning by creating triggers to reflective and reflexive dialogue. From a social constructionist perspective, storytelling is not seen as a method for discovering ‘reality’ or applying theory, but as a way of connecting and constructing a shared sense of our experience. Storytelling already occurs in conventional teaching in the form of techniques such as role plays and case studies. Conversations associated with these techniques often draw on modernist presuppositions about the deep structures that drive behavior and which can be identified by observers (Young, 1991). Such conversations focus on identifying objective social ‘facts’, patterns of behavior, and prescriptive answers. A problem arises when this ordering is seen as the way things really are or should be, because we may be imposing a false logic on situations -- the outside-in approach to learning. Critical management advocates questioning both dominant stories within organizations (Boje, 1994) and conventional methods of analysis.

Formalized stories may provide useful ‘virtual experiences’ in helping students connect theory and practice. However, connecting theory about practice in this way, does not necessarily help managers deal with everyday actions in-the-moment. I suggest constructing stories and focusing on how we talk about them is the key to learning from a more critical, reflexive perspective. This realization that stories may be potent triggers to learning came in a conversation with a manager. He told me that he had written a fable about a marauding band of renegades in the Middle Ages and presented it to his Board of Directors as a way of encouraging them to think about and question their business strategy. We discussed the impact of
his fable and how this may relate to the notions of reflex-reflective-reflexive interaction:

A :  .. you're saying,  in this instance that the story was more effective - that they bought in to the problem?
M  :   Yes, they could see into the story - it kind of challenged their authority as a Board to place it as a factual issue .... I think the important part here is the reflective part but I think they all kind of needed a reflex trigger.
A  :  That's interesting,  you said a need for a trigger ... to the reflective..?
M  :  Yes I think it often is.  I think a manager, an executive - particularly someone who is in a leadership position - is always looking for those triggers.  That’s part of leadership, saying 'how can I cause my management group, how can I cause my board, how can I cause my key customer base - right - to positively reflect, or reflect in a way so that we can have a positive outcome from the reflex event that we're in?

In this example, M was trying to create new reflective and reflexive ways of talking and he used a story as a trigger -- a way of painting an image his Board could connect with. He felt the story was more powerful in persuading the Board than factual information because it allowed them to make their own connections in a less threatening way. I began to think about how such triggers could provide potent ways of not only shaping organizational realities but of engaging students with learning issues and encouraging reflective and reflexive conversations.

As educators, we often take for granted the rhetorical nature of our conversations because we see our role as imparting information that we assume legitimates itself by its objectivity in both our and the students eyes. However, by objectifying stories (for example, as written case studies) we may take away the potency of learning generated when students engage in the story itself. In the previous excerpt, the manager’s storytelling allowed the listeners to make their own connections with the fable and perhaps be struck or experience an “incredulity” (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv) towards their current organizational discourse. This incredulity may need to occur paradoxically in both ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ contexts. If a context is too safe there may be no impetus to change, too unsafe may be felt to be too threatening. Management educators need to recognize the moments of opportunity in which reflective and reflexive dialogue may occur; where we begin to “think about thinking itself, about the categories in (our) heads and the categories (we) impose upon the world”  (Fox, 1992:4).

In trying to incorporate this in my own teaching, I began to realize that although I created stories for students (e.g., anecdotes, case studies, role plays), I didn't allow them to create their own. I didn’t encourage them to engage in reflective/reflexive conversations about their own experiences and therefore
learn in more potent and embodied ways. I started offering my undergraduate Organizational Behavior students an option of writing a journal. The aim of the journal is to help students make connections between conceptual material and their life; to link explicit knowledge and tacit knowing to become more “reflective practitioners” (Schon, 1983) and reflexive actors. I believe the journal creates opportunities in which they may be struck and articulate their practices in more reflective/reflexive ways. This process involves carrying a notebook around wherever they go and if they feel any ‘significant’ event, interaction, activity or conversation occurs - to jot down random thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc. about it as soon as possible. Later, they reflect on the situation and write about it, try to make sense, talk about their feelings, reactions and those of other people. They also connect this with any ideas or theories we've discussed in class and look at possibilities for change. They write the journal as a personal story, meet with me to discuss their stories, and hand the notebook in as they've written it. They can add to each journal throughout the semester and I encourage them to question their assumptions. This is a way of surfacing a process we tend to take for granted as teachers - how students connect explicit knowledge and with their experience or implicit knowing. In other words, they use their own stories and their feelings, reactions and actions as a basis for learning. I try to encourage this by co-authoring reflective/reflexive conversations with students. In this way, they are engaged in their own learning as practical authors.

Students write about many situations; work, class, meetings, friends, significant others, me ........, and we then discuss these in a one to one conversation. An entry by one student highlights the notions of reflex and reflective dialogue and co-authorship, and emphasized the need for reflexive awareness on my part. Her story was about a conversation with me in class:

“Before class, I typed up a quick agenda outlining the project and highlighting important issues in the case, ready for our group discussion of project #1. I thought it would be helpful as we had talked about the need for managers to make expectations clear, and for us as student managers, with little perceived legitimate authority, to establish our credibility. I was really quite proud of myself until you came over and asked me to explain what we were doing. I had felt quite clear on my objectives, but explaining it somehow killed the plan. I could barely speak and was embarrassed in front of my group. You were certainly diplomatic and looking out for our best interests, but explaining it somehow killed the plan. I could barely speak and was embarrassed in front of my group. You were certainly diplomatic and looking out for our best interests, but I felt stupid! At that point I asked the group if they felt it was a useless exercise and they said no, we should continue. But, the scene bugged me and around 10.30 or 11.00pm in bed, I realized that I was on track but a teacher’s inquisition threw me off so fast and so easy. There go my personal systems acting up again -- not having the confidence to say to a person of authority, ‘Yes this is exactly what I’m aiming to do and here’s why...’ But I don’t ‘think
on my feet' well. I felt like I backed down, caved in, acquiesced. I hate that! I felt less of a leader, less knowledgeable than I thought I was. I don’t like surprises. I love my little structured and planned world! (You messed with my comfort zone!) I need to be more assertive in explaining a plan/thought and stand by it, especially when questioned.”

I had been totally unaware of the impact of my questions in this situation, especially that she had felt it was an “inquisition” but was struck by her language. We explored this in a later conversation -- which provoked some reflective and reflexive comments from both of us: on my part about my taken-for-granted dialogical practices and the need to enact a reflexive practice and not just talk about it; on her part about her response which she also connected to her reactions at work. She commented that she had decided to try to speak more assertively in class and at work. She later said that not only had her relationship with her boss changed, but she felt more satisfied with her own ability to speak in more persuasive ways.

At one time, I would have focused only on the student’s learning and conveniently have forgotten my own, but here we discussed both of our insights as co-authors of the sense making process. The example highlights the need to capture that moment of being struck and the active nature of the learning process (Chia, 1992:18) by being aware of opportunities for learning that arise in everyday conversations. In this example, we were both ‘struck’ in different ways, at different times, by different aspects of the conversation.

Another example occurred within a classroom setting using a conventional technique. Some members of my undergraduate O.B. class were taking part in a video taped role play exercise designed to help study communication processes. They were acting out a management team meeting in which the student chairing meeting provoked the other ‘managers’ so much that they walked out of the meeting. I asked why, and their comments ranged from, ‘He wasn’t listening to my points’ to ‘I was just so frustrated with the way he treated us’. I pointed out that it wasn’t ‘real’ and they didn’t have a vested interest in the outcome and someone replied, ‘Oh yes it was! Even though I knew we were acting, I really felt angry with some of his comments and had to respond to them’. The participants had constructed their own ‘reality’ in an ‘artificial’ setting, which triggered an opportunity to discuss responsive action and the impact words have on constructing our social realities. It was a powerful dialogical opportunity for learning.

In summary, both of these examples offered an opportunity to engage in reflective/reflexive conversation
and construct practical theories about our ways of relating to others. Both students and teachers are co-authors of learning in relational-responsive practice. It is difficult to predetermine, capture or measure this form of learning because it is situated and relativized to the moment. However, as a result of being struck in this responsive and reflective dialogue, our ways of talking and relating can change. Stories (teacher and student) can be used as triggers to new ways of talking and acting. We need to be aware of the potency of stories in creating different ways of talking (both reflective and reflexive) with our students; an issue I discuss in more depth in the next section.

So What Are ‘Good’ Reflexive Learning Conversations?

How can we encourage more reflective and reflexive learning conversations? I have suggested the notion of reflex/reflective/reflexive dialogue is a way of helping us recognize those taken-for-granted aspects of our everyday talk and engage in more reflective and reflexive conversations in which we may find a practical grasp of the changing, moment-by-moment links and relations (Shotter, 1997). This view of learning elevates the need for reflective and reflexive dialogue by both faculty and students alike -- a dialogue that is opportunistic and transcends the classroom because it may stem from any moment in which we may be ‘struck’. In reflective dialogue we may use explicit knowledge and practical theories to help us make sense of our world, reflexive dialogue involves recognizing our assumptions and their impact and how these may influence our construction of ‘reality’.

In this sense, reflective and reflexive dialogue can involve a delicate balance between talking too much and talking too little, allowing students to make connections but not trying to connect for them. Therefore, such conversations are not structured and planned because “As soon as the intention is to follow a method in order to make good conversation happen, the very essence of good conversation that is transformative is violated” (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 1997: 7). Prescriptive conversations may offer one form of learning rooted in traditional forms of knowledge, however, I suggest as participants weave and construct learning relationally, they need to be open to the spontaneity and surprise of the conversation. We need to encourage students to question what is, test their assumptions and explore what may be. Dialogue is a key factor in this process of exploration (Lease & Nord, 1999). For example, my undergraduate O.B. students
were working on a group project. One student discussed motivation with me and commented that even though he felt a sense of pride in his group and wanted to do a good job on the project, his higher level needs couldn't be satisfied. He felt he couldn’t move up Maslow’s Hierarchy because his basic needs were not met within his group. This provided a great dialogical opportunity to engage in a reflective conversation about the validity of Maslow’s Theory and a reflexive conversation about the nature of theories in general and our assumptions that they represent reality.

Therefore, how we interact with students and create ‘good’ conversations is important, an issue highlighted by James Waters (1988: 179) who sees good conversation as a way in which managers develop “clear and compelling ethical positions” and create “feelings of obligation” on the part of others. I am suggesting that good reflective and reflexive conversations are crucial in enacting any sense making process, in helping create connections, questioning taken-for-granted aspects of our being and acting, and in developing new ways of talking and acting. We need to recognize the potency of our dialogical practices within these conversations. An example from a student journal illustrates how drawing attention to language can help students become more reflexively aware of the impact of their ways of speaking. His journal entry related to an incident when he told his group that he did not think they were working very effectively on their project:

> Although I’m sure I handled the feedback probably to the best of my ability at the time, I feel as though I need some work in this area. I say this because while I’m able to give direct feedback, it’s not always immediate. I get nervous when I need to be assertive, so sometimes it takes a build up of ammunition in order for me to shoot. I definitely could have handled the situation within my group much better if I had been more timely with my feedback. I would say, since I have had time to think about it, that the best possible way to give feedback is to give it constantly, because:
> 1) although waiting allows for a build up of ammo, it also allows for procrastination, which causes the situation to be harder to address at a later time or date.
> 2) if I give constant feedback, it now seems to me that it allows the group members to come to expect that feedback and react less defensively to it.

In our discussion about this journal entry, we (reflectively) linked the situation to course material on constructive feedback. We also (reflexively) surfaced the student's choice of language; ‘ammunition’, ‘shooting’, and how that may have related to how he spoke with his group and why they reacted so angrily. He commented in our discussion that he had “gone in, guns blazing” and had not considered how other
group members would respond to his way of talking.

These examples are not of theoretical insights or major intellectual breakthroughs, but moments in which we may: “understand something that is already in plain view” (Wittgenstein, 1953: #89) and “the difference they (words) make at various points in your life” (Wittgenstein, 1980: 85). Reflective and reflexive dialogue may therefore help us surface and be more critical of tacit, taken-for-granted knowing-in-action. This may provide a basis for constructing practical theories or insights into our practice. I am suggesting that learning can be far more potent if we look beyond critiques of theoretical content and be critical of our dialogue. We need to be aware of the potency of our own dialogical practices in making sense of and constructing our social realities.

Summary

In summary, I suggest a critical/social constructionist perspective allows us to reframe our notions of learning to an active and embodied process in which we are moved to make sense of our experience in different ways. Learning may be constructed as relational-responsive dialogue in which we connect tacit knowing and explicit knowledge; talk the imaginary into the imagined (Figure 1). In this sense, learning is talking and/or acting in different and more reflective/reflexive ways. It is not necessarily a structured, logical process but a dialogical one. To make this form of learning more potent, we need to understand how we may encourage or use those moments in which we are ‘struck’ to create reflexive dialogical opportunities for learning. I suggest this may be done by recognizing that everyday talk and experiences are as important as theoretical forms of talk and models; that we need to encourage students to become more aware of their taken-for-granted ways of acting and talking. This means being much more responsive to dialogical opportunities in the moment. I propose we educators also need a reflexive awareness of our own dialogical practices within learning conversations, our practical authorship and how this may impact the "conversationally sustained 'background' activity" (Shotter, 1997: 3) which is a creative force in our lives and our learning. In other words, we are all practical co-authors of our learning experiences.
REFERENCES

Holman, D., Pavlica, K. & Thorpe, R. 1997 Rethinking Kolb’s Theory of Experiential Learning in Management

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1 This study was carried out over a period of two years, initially to explore how managers learn in uncertain environments. I had a number of unstructured interviews with managers and asked them to complete the Honey & Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire (1983). It was during this period my understanding of the learning process began to change.
2 This refers to the letter ‘a’ in Figure 1.