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Reflexive Dialogical Practice in Management Learning

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 management learning and practice. Drawing from critical and social constructionist perspectives, I propose we need to ground critique by incorporating reflexive dialogical practice in management learning as a way of developing more critical and responsive practitioners. Specifically, I reconstruct learning as reflective/reflexive dialogue 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.* ***Key Words:*** *critical pedagogy; dialogical practice; learning conversations; reflexivity*

Criticisms of management education often address the consequences of its emphasis on a normative approach to learning (Roberts, 1996); specifically, that by advocating the systematic application of theory and techniques to every situation, it fails to consider that practitioners deal with ill-defined, unique, emotive and complex issues (Argyris, 1982; Vaill, 1989; Whetton and Cameron, 1983). As a result, management education does not deliver what it promises, nor does it help managers solve organizational or social problems (Schön, 1983: 39). Recently, authors have drawn on the postmodern debate to raise important questions about epistemology and pedagogy (French and Grey, 1996; Giroux, 1988). They suggest the need to develop a critical pedagogy, which may take a number of approaches: questioning managerialist ideologies, techniques of legitimation, and power (Boje and Dennehy, 1992; Knights, 1992; Mumby, 1988; Prasad and Cavanaugh, 1997) using a critical philosophy to question the nature of knowledge and education (Grey et al., 1996), encouraging students to carry out a critical re-interpretation of management and organization theory (Calás and Smircich, 1992; Carter and Jackson, 1993, Cooper, 1990; Schultz, 1992; Summers et al., 1997), or developing the critical thinking skills of students (Caproni and Arias, 1997; Chia and Morgan, 1996). While these approaches open up traditional pedagogy and teaching to

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critical questioning, they tend to ignore the view that competent practitioners rely on a tacit knowing-in-action to help them act within circumstances (Polanyi, 1966).

In this article I suggest we need to go beyond a purely intellectual critique to one grounded in the more informal, everyday ways of sense making and learning that are the essence of management practice—a critical questioning within practice. Drawing on social constructionist suppositions, I rework learning as a unique, complex, embodied, responsive process in which we are 'struck' (Goethe, 1988; Wittgenstein, 1980) and moved to change our ways of being, talking and acting. When linked with a critical stance, learning occurs as we reflexively engage in internal and/or external dialogue in an attempt to make sense of our experience (Watson, 1994). Thus, by reframing management learning as a reflexive dialogical practice, critique is situated in practice and self, rather than concepts and ideologies—self-reflexivity rather than meta-reflexivity (Chia, 1996a). This form of reflexivity draws attention to taken-for-granted aspects of learning and raises a key question:

> How can management educators and students, as practical co-constructors of the learning process, create new forms of reflexive talk and practice as a means of developing more critical practitioners?

This means not simply redesigning courses to incorporate critical management topics or issues, but rethinking our notions of learning, learning conversations, identity, and student–teacher power relations. As such, it is an approach that may be used to complement a critical pedagogy *and* offer a reflexive stance within conventional curricula.

I will explore two major implications: first, a social constructionist stance means reworking learning from a cognitive to a dialogical process. I offer 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 *from within the experience itself.* This means uncovering and thinking critically about aspects of our tacit knowing and acting as managers, learners and educators. Second, I explore how we may construct dialogical opportunities for learning by incorporating a practical reflexivity in our learning conversations; specifically, 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 notions of reflex, reflective and reflexive dialogue.

In explicating this argument, I offer examples from my own attempts to incorporate a reflexive approach while teaching within a conventional business curriculum. In doing so, I draw on a number of research conversations with managers,[1] in which we discussed the issues, events, problems and learning opportunities they experienced. These conversations formed the basis for developing a practical account of how managers act as 'authors' of their organizational realities (Shotter and Cunliffe, in press) and were formative in helping me rethink and reframe both my philosophical stance and my teaching practices. I also include excerpts from student journals to illustrate how learning may occur, in reflective and reflexive ways, from within experience. My intention is not to offer *techniques* for developing learning conversations, such as exploring experience, formulating theories and then testing them in action (Argyris, 1986; Schön, 1983;

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Senge, 1990), nor am I advocating conventional experiential learning models which offer logical, systematic framing devices without considering the social, political or historical context (Holman et al., 1997; Vince, 1998). Instead, I am suggesting the learning process is often complex and non-linear, and encompasses informal ways of sense making that are often taken for granted. We therefore need to focus on the singular events and conversations within which we construct practical accounts of our actions, identities and relationships with others, and which may guide our future action. It is *this process* that should be open to reflexive critique, because in helping students create new readings of their experience, we create possibilities for change in everyday interaction and, little by little, this can undermine the structures and practices of domination.

I will begin by outlining a definition of reflexive dialogical practice and then establish a need for this approach by contrasting assumptions within critical pedagogy with the presuppositions of this article. In doing so, I will emphasize that while many critical approaches focus on macropractices by questioning the structures, mechanisms, and processes of social domination, we also need to ground this questioning in our everyday practices as managers, learners, and educators. By focusing on micropractices and developing insights into ways in which we relate to our circumstances and to others, we can deal with the issues raised by critical management in more involved and responsive ways. In the second half of the article, I will offer some practical resources for creating and using opportunities for reflexive dialogical learning.

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)

Definitions

Within critical management, there are two themes of particular relevance to this article: problemizing the nature of language, and the issue of reflexivity. I cannot do justice to the complexity of each here, but will briefly outline the main tenets as a basis for defining reflexive dialogical practice.

Debates within postmodernism and social constructionism have led to a 'linguistic turn' in the social sciences. Notions of language as a means of representing reality are replaced by the idea that language is constitutive (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Watson, 1995); that social realities and our sense of self are created between us in our dialogical practices—our everyday interactions and conversations. Our knowledge of the world is also constructed through our interaction, and we make sense of what is happening around us as we talk (Prasad and Caproni, 1997; Shotter, 1997). This process is never complete or fully under our control because it emerges in the spontaneous, taken-for-granted, subjective, un/conscious ways in which we respond to others. If we accept this is so, then learning can be redefined from discovering already existing objective entities, to becoming more aware of how we constitute and maintain our 'realities' and identities. Knowledge incorporates a 'knowing-from-within'—knowing how to be a

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person of a certain kind and relate with others in particular circumstances (Shotter, 1993)—rather than an externally imposed system of abstract propositions or critique. Spinosa et al. (1997) call this form of knowing an ontological skill; acquiring certain sensibilities and attunements, of knowing one's way around inside a conversationally sustained reality. Our knowing-from-within is continually being re-constructed and updated in once-occurrent relational moments and acts of being, i.e. in embodied talk-entwined activity rather than in disembodied intellectual acts (Cunliffe and Shotter, 1999).

The issue of reflexivity is central to critical management studies because it draws on postmodern and social constructionist suppositions to highlight the inconsistent and problematic nature of explanation—that we construct the very accounts we think describe the world. We therefore need to question the ways in which we account for our experience. I take, as a starting point, Pollner's definition of radical reflexivity as 'an "unsettling", i.e., an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality' (1991: 370). The unsettling process is often seen as 'a turning back' (Lawson, 1985: 9) or questioning of truth claims, language, texts, and ways in which we theorize about the world (Ashmore, 1989; Foucault, 1972; Heidegger, 1966). In doing so, we may expose unspoken assumptions that may have an enduring effect upon agendas and power relationships in particular contexts. Understanding the insidiousness of this process, and that there may be hidden multiple interpretations, is central to a critical reflexive analysis. I suggest we need to go further, to explore 'the dialectics of the relationship, the interstitial area, the exchange of perspectives' (Linstead, 1994: 1327) from *within our own experiences*. Essentially, reflexive dialogical practice—engaging in dialogue (oral or written) with self/others/other—draws on these linguistic and reflexive suppositions to:

> . . . highlight the tacit assumptions and ideologies that subsist in our ways of talking, explore how our own actions, conversational practices, and ways of making sense (as managers, educators, and learners) may create and be sustained by particular ways of relating and by implicit and explicit power relationships.

In this way, we might work towards more linguistically expressible and reflexive accounts, from within experience itself, so that we may act as more critical practitioners to influence events from inside.

Reflexivity is very different to reflection. I will explore the practical differences later in the article (see Figure 2), but at this point would like to offer a brief definition. Reflection is traditionally defined as a mirror image. This idea incorporates the modernist view that there is an original we can think about, categorize and explain. Schön (1983) talks about reflection-in-action, a process of making connections and constructing an understanding of a situation by testing 'intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena' (p. 241). So, whereas reflection is often seen as a systematic thought process concerned with simplifying experience by searching for patterns, logic, and order, reflexivity means complexifying thinking or experience by exposing contradictions, doubts, dilemmas, and possibilities (Chia, 1996b). Conventional forms of education focus on the former, critical upon the latter. However, I suggest conventional and many critical forms of education fail to offer *practical* ways of moving forward because they focus on a disembodied intellectual critique from outside practice. This can, ironically,

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disempower individuals who may feel they are not in a position to influence processes of domination or managerialism. With this in mind, I will explore the differences between the inside-out reflexive practice I'm suggesting, and the outside-in reflexive and reflective analysis implicit to many critical approaches.

The Need

The postmodern debate has problemized assumptions about the ideologies underscoring management, management knowledge and 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. Put very simply, management is about control and surveillance (Barker, 1993; Knights and Willmott, 1995; Townley, 1994), management knowledge about developing ever more sophisticated forms and techniques of control (Kallinikos, 1996), and management education about teaching, *and using*, those methods of control to create managers who are morally neutral technicians (MacIntyre, 1981; Roberts, 1996) and educated agents of progress. A critical stance advocates the scrutiny of these issues by problemizing assumptions and generating multiple perspectives.

Conventional and many critical approaches both regard knowledge in an objective, abstract or analytical way—a criticism of some thing; ideology, theory, text, or process. While seeing critical appreciation as a basis for emancipation and change, fundamentally, knowledge and practice remain separate because the focus lies on a *reflexive intellectual critique of* rather than *acting reflexively within* circumstances. The impact on management education is mainly an epistemological one because educators focus on developing a critical pedagogy of management (Grey et al., 1996: 95). Therefore while critical stances may open up conventional managerial ideologies, forms of knowledge and teaching to critical questioning, they do not necessarily help managers act within their everyday experience in more critical ways. The main reason for this is that both conventional and critical approaches focus on realities and systems existing independently from our own personal involvement, and use external or third party frames of analysis and critique. I will briefly summarize my concerns before moving on to propose the need to incorporate reflexive dialogical practices in management learning. These concerns relate to differences between the discourse of management education and management practice, and 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 and does not necessarily help managers become more critical—and moral—practitioners.

The discourse of management education and that of management practice are very different. As academics, we talk about ideologies, social structures and systems of domination that 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. The goal of critical management education is to 'liberate individual and collective human potential' (Caproni and Arias, 1997: 294) by encouraging critically reflexive readings of 'texts', and by

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addressing the discursive structures that control, normalize, dominate, and support managerialism. However, this often encompasses a first-order reflexivity in which we (learners, teachers, managers) do not turn these readings upon ourselves (Chia, 1996a) but are critical of a generalized other. We are encouraged to protest and resist that generalized other without becoming aware of how to liberate our own potential.

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, how they felt, and dilemmas they faced. They used the everyday language of participants within the situation; 'grappling with stuff' and 'railroad trains' hitting them. One manager talked about a project in which she was responsible for coordinating the relocation of a number of different departments. She described a 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 these more informal and often taken-for-granted ways of sense making (we'll get beaten up so we need three of us) 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.* Given this, we need to help managers recognize the wider discursive structures in which they act, that they are acting beings within those structures, and can make sense of their actions in practical and responsive ways from inside experience. This 'inside-out' approach assumes that, rather like a hologram, every small insight, question, or action leads to different ways of relating, which work from within, to influence the whole.

What I'm suggesting here, is a second-order reflexivity in which we ourselves are text—self-in-relation-to-others. In this case, we need to be aware of the discursive structures that may subsist in our ways of talking, *and* how our actions may create and sustain these. Self-reflexivity is crucial because it is the basis for questioning the way we relate with others. By focusing on our own, often unacknowledged, representations of realities and working from within our experience, the impetus for change can be far more powerful than that mediated by externally imposed frames. So, how might we help managers develop a more critical and self-reflexive awareness of how our tacit assumptions influence ways in which we make sense of and construct different realities? How might we access those often responsive and unselfconscious moments in which we respond to our embodied sense of what is happening? How do we articulate the tacit knowing/assumptions often deep within us? I suggest we begin by rethinking our notions of learning.

The separation of theory and practice is reinforced in conventional models of learning, which see learning as a process that takes place inside the head: a disembodied intellectual activity in which mind and body, intellect and emotion, thinking and acting are separate (Fox, 1997). Managers rarely exist in an intellectual vacuum devoid of emotion. Indeed, emotions may play a major role in

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shaping organizational practices as well as our learning experiences (Fineman, 1997). As 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 either conventional or critical-based management pedagogies, which bypass subjective feelings for more objective, structural, or ideological issues. Indeed critical approaches often dehumanize and disempower people by viewing them as occupants of discursive space, or products of systems of control. The implicit message is that it is not OK to recognize we are living, acting, embodied beings because this is a false consciousness. Feelings tend to be suppressed under a façade of criticality rather than being brought out into the open: a view which elevates the conventional cognitive aspects of learning in which individuals are seen to think then act. As Hardy and Clegg (1997: S10) suggest, 'despite promising salvation, critical theory may place the subject in constraints as binding as those it seeks to overthrow'.

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. Whereas emotion may lead to anxiety and defense, it can also be an inevitable feature of learning by heightening awareness and sensitivity to what is happening around us (Fineman, 1997). In other words, we need to recognize the embodied and responsive nature of both practice and learning, because emotions often trigger new ways of being and relating as we engage with the possibilities of the situation. Carson's quote from a student about a professor illustrates the holistic nature of this 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.' (1996: 13)

The student responded to many aspects of the class; ideas, the teacher, energy, the air, the conversation ... all of which impacted the way he or she felt. In this sense learning was experienced as an embodied process.

How can we incorporate these issues into the learning process? If we are to have an impact on management practice, we need to recognize the embodied nature of the learning process and focus on helping managers develop a critical practice *from within experience*. This may be achieved by helping managers develop self-reflexivity, an ability to question their own ways of making sense of the world. One way of doing this may be by reframing critical management suppositions within the context of everyday, lived experience and sense making. From this perspective, reflexive dialogue is an essential part of the learning process and of helping us

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move from being morally-neutral technicians to considering the morality and responsiveness of our practices.

Learning as an Embodied, Reflexive Dialogical Process

> . . . the words you utter or what you think as you utter them are not what matters, so much as the difference they make at various points in your life. (Wittgenstein, 1980: 85)

Learning may therefore be reframed as an embodied (whole body), 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. Essentially, being struck involves our spontaneous response (emotional, physiological, cognitive) to events or relationships occurring around—a feeling there is something important we cannot quite grasp in the moment. Goethe (1988)[2] envisions this as an 'aperçu', an impression or anticipatory experience that may act as an impetus for seeing relations or events in different ways. Such an impression may be our response to an event, a comment, a sense of difference, or an experience of new feelings. Being struck is an anticipation of unfolding understanding, of making new connections between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge as we construct our sense of situations in ways not visible to us previously. However, we do not necessarily work through these moments by applying theory, instead we often try to grasp a more complete sense by exploring and articulating feelings and features from within the experience. In doing so, we may question and construct new possibilities, new ways of talking and acting. As such, 'being struck' offers an opportunity for learning, for making sense as we work though the experience. By drawing attention to this active and emergent nature of learning process and encouraging students to become more self-reflexive, learning can spill over into everyday practices. In the remainder of the article, I offer examples of different ways in which this learning may occur.

In Figure 1, I reframe learning as an embodied, reflexive dialogical process in which we are struck and moved to reflect on and/or reflexively question our ways of being and understanding. Learning is not necessarily structured, but a potentially messier process of making connections. It involves both explicit knowledge (theoretical forms of talk) and tacit knowing, a 'practical consciousness' (Giddens, 1984: 6) or everyday sense making in which we implicitly know things about our surroundings (people, places, actions) that we may be unable to articulate or even recognize. I propose that between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge is an area of 'muddy water' that creates a space in which possibilities for learning and constructing new understandings from within our experience open up. How we react to these possibilities may differ, and may be influenced by our opportunities for reflective/reflexive dialogue with others or with ourselves. 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 an embodied trigger for clearing the muddy water because it is where we may begin to explore possibilities and connect our tacit and explicit knowing. The process of making connections may occur in many ways but, as educators, we may be able to help students engage in learning by encouraging reflexive dialogue about those striking moments. Once

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students have grasped the core aspects of this practice, they are able to engage in reflexive conversations with themselves, colleagues, other students, and in other settings.

Figure 1 (a)[3]

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 actions by linking theory and practice in reflective/reflexive dialogue with self or others. I experienced this type of learning during my PhD when listening to the tapes of my conversations with managers. I began by analyzing their comments using chaos theory as a frame. Then it struck me that the managers themselves were not talking about fractals or strange attractors, but 'fuzziness' and 'baptisms of fire'. I felt this way of talking was somehow important but didn't know why, I had neither the language nor the explicit knowledge to articulate and construct any sense. It took me many months of reading and talking to colleagues before I began to put bits and pieces together. I kept a journal at the time in which I wrote about feelings, readings, meetings that somehow influenced my learning. Even in retrospect, I can see this working through the issues was not a linear process, but bits of conversations, other moments of being struck, and a lot of internal argumentation. In the section, 'Our Notions of Identity', I offer another example of how an embodied response provided an opportunity to connect elements of explicit knowledge and practical theories and engage in reflexive dialogue about the process.

Figure 1 Learning: reflective and reflexive dialogue

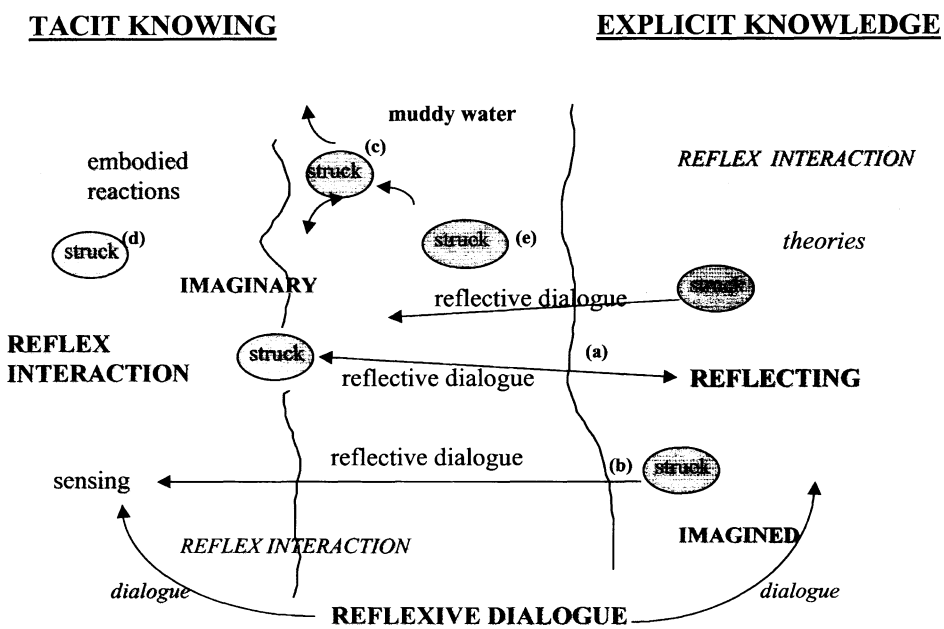

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Figure 1 (b)

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 implicit in most educational practices, which are based on the assumption that theory provides insight into practice. From this perspective, theory provides a means of generating a different understanding as we connect models or techniques with our own experiences. 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 on situations from 'outside', and using explicit knowledge to explain actions. An example of this approach is the use of metaphors as devices for critique (Morgan, 1986). 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. From a critical perspective, Alvesson and Willmott (1996) offer a more reflexive approach by suggesting critical theory can generate insight by focusing attention on unacknowledged representations of management, and in doing so could bring about change. In addition, reflexive dialogue *from within* can surface our own assumptions and tacit ideologies, question the limits and constraints we may impose on self and others, and explore how we may create possibilities for a more critical practice.

Figure 1 (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.

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Figure 1 (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. Further dialogue may influence us in ways of which we are unaware. One manager I spoke with offered a good example of this—of how someone's 'emotional loading' may influence his or 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".'

Thus we may be drawing on tacit knowing as we act in unselfconscious ways.

Figure 1 (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 they forgot the course material as soon as they finished the exam? I suggest that this may be because the material did not strike or 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 and 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, a tacit knowing or perhaps an apercu which is not yet shared as an ongoing languaged activity (the imagined). Learning conversations (with self, others, oral, written) offer a way in which we may create the imagined from the imaginary.

I am not advocating throwing the baby out with the bathwater and getting rid of all conventional approaches and theory. I am suggesting management education

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needs to incorporate both a critical stance towards ideologies and management strategies *and* a reflexive dialogical stance. The latter is fundamental in making sense of and constructing lived experience because it is concerned with more active aspects of management learning. Reflexive dialogical practice helps us become aware of how our assumptions, ways of talking, and our practical theories help shape, and are shaped by, our responsive interactions with others. Practical theories are not scientific, rational or theoretical ways of ordering, but aspects of our situated, embodied knowing—ways in which we make connections with self, others and our social landscape. This way of understanding recognizes that both traditional and practical theories are important in the process of making sense.

The impact of this approach on management learning is that the focus shifts from a purely theoretical *talking about practice* as an uninvolved observer (outside-in), to include a dialogical, responsive *talking in practice* (inside-out). By embracing this dialogical view of sense making, the ways in which managers, students, and management educators talk becomes a creative force in learning. This tends to be a taken-for-granted aspect of the practice of conventional and critical management educators who talk *about* or *of* theory. I will explore some of the possibilities this raises for management learning.

Management Learning: A Reflexive Dialogical Practice

I am suggesting we need 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 within and about practice?

Critical pedagogies aim to dislodge managerialism by standing back and questioning ideologies and techniques and practices of domination, hierarchy, and control—but managerialism still exists within business and academic contexts. Indeed, many management students and educators work within organizations in which discursive structures institutionalize and espouse managerialism in implicit and explicit ways (Boje, 1994, 1996; Cooper, 1989). We have hierarchies, a need for competitive advantage, for technological dominance, and (presumably) we engage in education to improve management skills and career prospects in this context. As educators, we ourselves are agents of control and surveillance as we share our 'expertise', and categorize and evaluate the performance of our students—whatever ideology we subscribe to, whether managerialism, critical, or constructionist. In other words, both students and academics bring traces of wider discursive structures, ideologies, and power relations into the learning process. While critical approaches may surface these wider contextual influences; they can often result in impotence unless we also recognize the formative, relational, and embodied nature of local discourse (the practical use and impact of spoken and

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written language). My basic premise is that local discourse both influences and is influenced by wider discursive structures and, by recognizing this, we can move from token ideological critique to helping students (and educators) think and act differently.

Reflexive dialogical practice draws upon a radically reflexive stance (Pollner, 1991) to recognize the part we play in constructing the 'realities', 'systems', 'structures', and practices we critique. By focusing on our own experience, change may occur from within. In essence, it involves recognizing our own place and ability to shape knowledge, learning and organizational realities. 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 and recognizing dialogical opportunities for learning; and incorporating a practical reflexivity in learning conversations. I will explore potential resources for reflexive dialogical practice by offering examples from my attempts to incorporate these new ways of talking and learning into my own teaching practices.

Our Notions of Identity: Educators and Learners as Practical Authors

According to Shotter 'the basic practical–moral problem in life is not what to do but what to be' (1993: 118). Social constructionist suppositions reframe knowledge from cognitive-representational to a responsive knowing-from-within. This results in a fundamental shift in our view of the nature of learning, pedagogy, and most importantly, of our selves as teachers/students. When linked with critical suppositions, this involves questioning what it means to be educators and learners. We become practical authors (Shotter, 1993) of our own experiences, knowledge and learning 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. Radical reflexivity means recognizing that teachers and students act as practical *co-authors* of understanding in this 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 towards a more symmetrical relationship. Within traditional management education, the manager/teacher is expert and in control of the learning process as he or she disseminates information. However, from a social constructionist perspective, learning is seen as a constitutive activity in which teachers and learners are participants and 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 or her legitimacy to impose his or 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 also *incorporating it within our dialogical practices* with students. In this way, practical theories—accounts of experience—may be constructed between teacher and students, and by students in their dialogue. The need to feel we are practical authors and experience the active part we play in learning is supported by

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Bickford and Van Vleck, who argue learners are engaged when 'they sense that they are collaboratively shaping something unique as they interact' (1997: 460). From a critical perspective, this process of engagement involves engaging with others and the otherness of our experience; a sense that lies at the boundaries of becoming rather than already in being. By keeping these assumptions and practices to the fore, as teachers and learners we may engage in more democratic and responsive practices that spill over into other contexts.

Within co-authorship, teacher and student may have to negotiate the spaces between academic and management (everyday) language or 'speech genres' (Bakhtin, 1986: 95). Baker and Kolb contrast the typical approach to learning, the 'outside-in approach which leaves human affairs to the experts' and focuses on the application of theory to practice, the analysis and recall of information, to the 'inside-out perspective, which is rooted in our personal experience' (1993: 26). They argue the latter is more effective in valuing diversity and plurality in organizations, a view I extend to sharing authorship and recognizing multiple perspectives in learning conversations. From this perspective, learning involves recognizing our authorship—our ability to shape situations through reflective and reflexive dialogical practices, i.e. the micropractices of authorship and its shared, responsive nature.

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. In our conversations, students often raise issues that create opportunities for me to do some reflexive questioning of power relations and co-authorship in the classroom. One such moment arose as I read a student's paper and was struck by the language (my italics) she used:

> . . . the more glaring and obvious insights and the moments *in which my mind was 'silenced' by the voice of this course* that challenged me to seek a personal identity to an entity that I call 'myself'. And if I were to summarize in a few words, the most profound effect was an increased awareness of the absence of an absolute truth, and *that the sooner we recognize and come to terms with this,* there are endless possibilities to shape and reshape our world, to color it, and recreate it.

This raised a number of reflexive questions: how have I 'silenced'? Have I created a self-referential paradox: there's no absolute truth—and the sooner you see that's true then . . . ? I need to look at the subtext of my own dialogical practices, the implicit power relations that still exist no matter how responsive I think I am! In other words, I cannot forget the discursive relations outside the immediate interactive setting of the course. Students arrive with expectations about what and how they are going to learn and of faculty–student relationships. The mainly orthodox discourse of our curriculum supports and rewards this. However, I believe that by working from within, by engaging in reflexive dialogue, we begin to create new possibilities for relating and acting. Students (and faculty) are not passive recipients but active participants: how do we encourage a more critical practice?

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Resources for Reflexive Practice: Constructing 'Dialogical Opportunities' for Learning

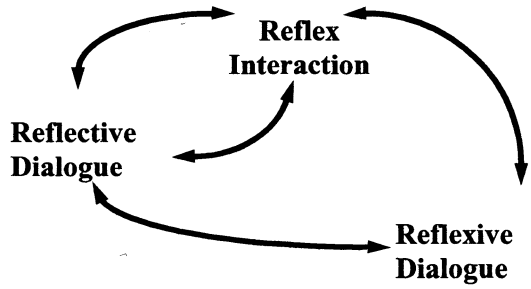
> Not what one man is doing now, but the whole hurly-burly, is the background against which we see an action, and it determines our judgment, our concepts, and our reactions. (Wittgenstein, 1980, 2: 629)

Can we help students and ourselves develop more self-reflexive and critical practices? 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 surface knowing-from-within or those previously unnoticed features of our interaction and learning? I suggest we can create *reflexive dialogical opportunities* by being opportunistic and by encouraging students to recognize their own authorship. This involves emphasizing a reflective and reflexive process in the classroom, constructing dialogical opportunities for learning, and helping students recognize and learn from those moments in which they may be struck.

Emphasizing reflexive dialogue I emphasize this process in my undergraduate and graduate organizational behavior (OB) courses by highlighting two main underlying threads: practical authorship and reflex/reflective/reflexive dialogue. I begin by talking through the notions of practical authorship and at the graduate level I also discuss the underlying suppositions. I emphasize the responsive aspect of interaction by suggesting we may view our conversations as a reflex–reflective–reflexive process (see Figure 2).

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 other participants and the otherness of our surroundings. Reflex interaction is not a self-conscious process but involves acting out of instinct, feeling, or habit, and draws intuitively on our tacit knowing or perhaps 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

Figure 2 Dialogical interaction



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on or in the process (Figure 1 (a), (b)). For example, 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 learning.

Building on the definition given earlier, reflective thinking is often seen to be a logical, objective and analytical process where we attempt to make sense of experience, sometimes by invoking theory (Bailey et al., 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 way of trying to organize disorganized talk and create a shared sense of our surroundings. Baker et al. 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 (Figure 1 (c)) because reflective dialogue incorporates sense-making devices. In this way, we may construct order or connections through theoretical/explicit as well as practical and tacit ways of talking; in retrospect or in-the-moment. *Talking about* case studies, being critical of ideologies, or a past experience involves retrospective reflection, an outside-in approach in which we use frames to make sense of something external to us—but which we are then expected to apply to our own situation. 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's O B paper in which he reflects on 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 ... 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 disembody 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*

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way of being in the world or move us to talk in different ways. Also, reflective conversations do not usually incorporate 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 their paradoxical assumptions and the impact their language might have on their actions and the reactions of others. I offer two examples of this in the following pages.

Critical pedagogy usually incorporates a 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, critical, and conventional perspectives and compare readings 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 students to develop a reflexive awareness of their own suppositions and the impact on their learning. However, this usually has no personal meaning 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—an example of Figure 1 (a). We had a conversation immediately after the exam (same exam, different group from the previous excerpt) in which he expressed his disquiet that things had not gone well, but he 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 distinction between outside-in and inside-out learning. The first excerpt is an example of outside-in learning, the student reflects upon the situation using theory to define and make sense of what is—rather as an observer. In the second excerpt, the

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student uses an inside-out approach, exploring how his own involvement, assumptions, and dialogue, and the responses of other group members might have impacted the process of constructing reality; an example of reflexive dialogue.

Reflexive dialogue places each of us as practical authors and critical questioners within our social experiences. My second example of reflexive dialogue is taken from another student's paper. We had a number of conversations about her experience of information sharing, and the lack of it, among course members. We had briefly discussed Foucault's notions of knowledge/power. In her paper she linked the two but spoke from within her experience. She began by questioning her initial assumptions, articulated and then explored her questions and dilemmas, and a discussed a number of realizations. I have taken excerpts from different parts of her paper:

> I assumed we were here first and foremost to learn; last and finally, to compete against each other. I did not anticipate that there would be a power structure, and that this power structure would be based in part on information sharing, and that it could potentially interfere with the desire to learn through exchange. I did not know that by openly sharing information, power could be lost. I had never really thought of information sharing as having any relationship with power . . . yet, from my observations during the first ten weeks of the program, [they] are clearly linked. Lastly, I trusted that my openness and desire to share [my theories in action] would earn respect and be reciprocated. I was wrong.
>
> Have we been socialized to act and respond in a specific manner? Does our response correspond to some ultimate desired result—do we have an agenda? Is it dependent upon our culture? Are our actions and reactions predicated on our insecurities and/or vulnerabilities? . . . Foucault believes that power is inescapable and seeps through into the core of our being. We think in language so we think in terms of power.
>
> As I worked through my struggles with regard to information sharing . . . I have made several realizations. [*She discusses these in some depth*] It is only through these realizations, and my learning through such, that I am better able to understand the dynamics of information sharing and am better prepared to move forward.

This is an example of how critical approaches can generate insight into our own experiences (Figure 1 (b)) but, when used as an inside-out approach, can create opportunities for reflexive dialogue and be a powerful trigger to learning.

Constructing 'dialogical opportunities' for learning Stories can offer dialogical opportunities for learning by creating triggers to reflective and reflexive dialogue. 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 that can be identified by observers (Young, 1991). Such conversations focus on identifying objective social 'facts', patterns of behavior, and prescriptive answers. While providing a virtual experience to help students connect theory and practice, this approach often imposes a particular ideological/theoretical stance and a false logic.

Critical management advocates questioning dominant stories within organizations (academic and business institutions) and their impact on power relations (Boje, 1994). However, connecting theory about practice in this way does not

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necessarily help managers change everyday actions. I suggest recognizing and constructing stories within our experience and focusing on *how* our language influences action, is the key to learning from a more critical, reflexive perspective. My realization that stories may be potent triggers to learning came in a conversation with a manager. I commented that he told a lot of stories, and he told me 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 help students reflect upon situations but may take away the potency of learning that may be 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 for reflective and reflexive dialogue; 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

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reflective/reflexive conversations about their own experiences and therefore learn in more potent and embodied ways. I started offering my undergraduate OB students an option of writing a journal. The aim of the journal is to help them make connections between conceptual material and their life; to link explicit knowledge and tacit knowing to become more 'reflective practitioners' (Schön, 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 inside-out process involves carrying a notebook around and—if they feel any significant event, interaction, activity or conversation occurs—to jot down random thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc. (reflex) about it as soon as possible. Later, they reflect on the situation and write about it, try to make sense, talk about their feelings and 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, during which 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 with their experience or implicit knowing (Figure 1 (a)). 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 one-on-one conversations with students.

Students write about many situations: work, class, meetings, friends, significant others, me ... An entry by one student highlighted 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 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 11.00 pm 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

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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, 1996b) 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 OB 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, these situations offered opportunities 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 this 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, our ways of talking and relating can change. We need to be aware of the potency of stories (teacher and student) and language in creating triggers to new ways of talking and acting.

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—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. This radically reflexive approach means engaging in dialogical interaction in symmetrical ways, in which neither participant has full control over learning.

In this sense, reflective and reflexive dialogue can involve a delicate balance between talking too much and talking too little, allowing students to make

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connections but trying not 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 et al., 1997: 7). As participants weave and construct learning in relational ways, they need to be open to the spontaneity and surprise of the conversation and explore what may be (Lease and Nord, 1999). For example, my undergraduate OB 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 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 in which he told his group he did not think they were working very effectively on their project and they became angry.

> 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 this language may have influenced his behavior and his group members' response. These examples are not of theoretical insights or major

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intellectual breakthroughs, but moments in which we may be struck; 'understand something that is already in plain view' (Wittgenstein, 1953: 89) and the difference this new understanding may make to our lives.

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 struck and moved to make sense of our experience in different ways. Reflexive dialogical practice can enhance learning by helping us connect tacit knowing and explicit knowledge and become more aware of how we create the imagined from the imaginary (Figure 1). This involves engaging in dialogue (spoken or written) with self/others/other to highlight the tacit assumptions and ideologies that subsist in our ways of talking, and exploring how our own actions, conversational practices, and ways of making sense (as managers, educators, and learners) may create and be sustained by particular ways of relating and by implicit or explicit power relationships. In working on these moments from within, we can develop a critical stance by becoming more aware of the subtle effects of our discursive practices from the perspective of involved participants and creators of change, rather than external, analytical observers and protesters. By questioning at many levels; self, others, theory, language, knowledge, reality, ideology, we may become more critical and responsive practitioners—better able to 'be actively engaged in the much-needed search for fundamental alternatives to current ways of organizing and "doing things"' (Prasad and Cavanaugh, 1997: 315).

Notes

1. This field work was carried out over a period of three years as part of my PhD. Initially, my purpose was to explore how managers work and learn in uncertain environments, although this changed to reworking management as practical authorship and assessing the implications of this for management learning. I began by carrying out a number of unstructured interviews with managers and asked them to complete the Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire (1986). It was during this period that my understanding of the learning process began to change.
2. Quoted in Shotter (2000).
3. This refers to the letter 'a' in Figure 1.

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