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Jazzing up the classroom: Reflections on developing a critical pedagogy in M level teaching

Abstract

The intended focus of this research was to explore the relationship between the teaching approach of a postgraduate module and the development of critical management education pedagogy. We utilise a combined action learning and group work approach adopting principles of action learning and reflection. The paper reports on the views of three academics reflecting on the development of a new module, two years into the delivery and explores the impact of using an alternative delivery model to generate a transformational learning environment while developing students' approach to scholarship, research, and writing.

The paper draws on literature on the Jazz metaphor and the relevance of a Jazz approach, with an emphasis on collaboration, trust, improvisation, and creativity, to developing critical research in management education. Key findings point to the 'notion of pedagogical shock' for both students and staff. Students found the change in teaching techniques to be a challenge. However, the anecdotal evidence seemed to suggest improved engagement culminating in improved results. The article therefore offers an opportunity for fellow academics to consider their approach to teaching and learning and whether such an adaptation would work for them, in their setting.

Key Words

Critical management education pedagogy, pedagogical shock, action learning and group work, reflection, postgraduate, management education,

Introduction

A recurring theme for the past two decades has been how we can develop greater criticality in teaching and learning, in particular at postgraduate level, with recent calls for critical management education pedagogy (CMEP) in management learning (Peritton and Reynolds, 2018) and preparing managers for practice through critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2016). Vince (2004) argues the integration of a collective approach of reflection and action learning is critical to deeper learning and in achieving organisational learning, while Reynolds considers critical management education as the inclusion of critical thinking through lectures and readings being embedded into the programme (Peritton and Reynolds, 2018). Mughal et al (2018) point to the need for criticality in learning practice and the importance of facilitation in action learning sets to develop criticality and allow challenges to ingrained culture and power relations. Rigg and Trehan (2004) use action learning to engage participants in investigating and questioning organisational practices to make connections between learning and work experiences which promote critical thinking, rigorous evidence-based debate and challenge to 'taken for granted' ideas.

The structural changes in UK Higher Education (HE), such as the internationalisation of student cohorts, produces calls for more research to support 'criticality expressed through classroom practice and educational design' (Perriton and Reynolds, 2018 p49). Rigg and Trehan (2004) note the need for action learning approaches as a way of supporting students to challenge and question knowledge and learning processes in a critical way. For some time, academics have attempted to review and reflect on the notion of critical management education pedagogy (Reynolds, 1999a, 1999b, Perriton and Reynolds, 2018). This article centres on the reflections of three academics who consider the attempt to develop a critical approach within the teaching of one module on a postgraduate programme using critical management education pedagogy to engage students in the learning process. This draws parallels with practice in Jazz which emphasises creativity and learning through practice within a social community.

The Jazz metaphor is no stranger to management education with the analogy having been applied to a now extensive list of business and management areas, such as leadership, marketing and organisational strategy (Holbrook 2015 p958). The Jazz approach emphasises ideas such as collaboration and trust, collegiate dialogue, and improvisation and innovation within shared boundaries. It shows respect for tradition, but also tolerance for dissonance and

the opening up of space to support and share ideas. Jazz theory has been applied effectively to higher education and business and management learning (Luquet, 2015; Dennis 2015). Meyer and Shambu (2010) detail how Jazz can assist management teaching in higher education especially with the increasing importance of globalisation and internationalisation of the student body. Jazz supports a synthesis of cultures and traditions within a lifelong and continuous learning process, involving trial and error, improvisation and innovation, risk taking, harmony and conflict (Meyer and Shambu, 2010; Dennis 2015). Higher education educators are like Jazz musicians. They work within established curricula constraints but are relatively free to innovate and improvise to improve based on experience, what works and what does not. Like Jazz higher education can be rooted in either conformist or radical social ideas. While the Jazz-business management education metaphor can be over-extended (Breault, 2006) this paper argues that it remains relevant and valid and can be linked to CMEP theory to help management students understand the nature and complexity of contemporary organizational behaviour with improvisation used to critically innovate and develop effective business practices in more complex contemporary environments.

Our experience was that research was traditionally ‘taught’ in a ‘how to’ way which encouraged students to see research as something with a pattern to be followed to produce a uniform or formulaic ‘product’. This parallel with closely following a pattern did not fit with ‘our’ experience of conducting our own research where researchers develop different but equally valid approaches to gaining new knowledge and learn through being part of an active research community. In essence the module was focussed on developing creativity and criticality in the perception of research rather than students taking a purely systematic approach. The module was established; with a foundation in the use of action learning principles as these allowed students to openly examine different approaches to how to develop their research and their own voice and style.

Context

On revalidation an aim was to differentiate the pedagogical approach at postgraduate level, providing a much more critical approach to management education. A new module was devised as a vehicle for introducing a critical management pedagogy that would introduce the student body to differing approaches to research methodology.

The module was delivered across two semesters making use of a range of guest speakers who had produced research adopting different philosophical approaches on a weekly basis. The sessions consisted of alternating one hour and two-hour sessions. The one-hour session consisted of a research presentation by the author of a paper followed by an open question and answer session. The two-hour session consisted of students reflecting and discussing the methodology and context of the paper, followed by a presentation in the learning sets during the first hour. The second hour then consisted of two aspects. Firstly, the development of concepts raised during the group learning set which required reviewing a paper in preparation for the following week.

As this process was new for the students (and that the majority of students were international) support sessions and 1:1 help was available for the students to provide additional opportunities for them to develop. These sessions allowed students opportunities to discuss the challenges they were facing with this new delivery style and the different requirements that were needed from the students. The support sessions were particularly relevant for the international students who alongside the challenges of this new pedagogical approach were also facing the challenge of moving into an unfamiliar HE system and living environment.

A secondary aim of the revalidation was how to engage and connect with students, who have experienced more traditional teaching approaches, to make them more research focused. Revalidation provided an opportunity to embed a critical approach to teaching and learning which it was hoped would lead to improvements in student engagement (Shultz et al, 2013) and encourage students to question and challenge perceived wisdom (Reynolds and Vince, 2004) to have a more “transformational educational experience” (Scorza et al, 2013 p16). Our aspiration was that students would not only seek to learn how to do research but learn how to learn, how to engage and immerse themselves fully in the research process and to stimulate and support them to experiment with different approaches and directions.

Disrupting traditional approaches to teaching research was intended to develop criticality and openness to new ideas. Central to this ambition was the intention to draw from the Jazz metaphor and encourage students to improvise, consider and try out new ideas, be open to challenging the existing social order and conventional approaches to stimulate the eventual production of more challenging research projects.

The structure and vision for the new module, rather than adopting conventional didactic knowledge transfer sought to involve students, staff, guest professors and senior researchers in a more open learning ‘community’ of critically reflective researchers. Fundamental to the design was adopting an inter-disciplinary (within a business management context) approach to research and research design. Once validated and in the run up to the start of the module, several prominent researchers were approached to present papers, to provide a status to the module and give gravitas to self-criticism and critical reflective practice. At the same time as we developed the module for delivery, we decided to take a group learning approach that encouraged students to reflect on their understanding of research and their epistemological, ontological and philosophical positions.

The professorial and senior researcher led presentations were deep and critical in content, of conventional business management and management learning practice, and in methods, critically reflective of diverse methodological approaches, and in teaching style, with different professors bringing different ways of engaging. The presenters drew on a wide range of disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological backgrounds and approaches. Following stimulating presentations students were encouraged to ask questions and challenge concepts and ideas.

Critical Education Management Pedagogy and the Jazz Approach

Teaching in higher education requires dedication to continuous review and reflection on pedagogies particularly in relation to developing postgraduate students to be socially responsible citizens while preparing them for work in a global business environment. The reflections are based on experiences working with an international student population helping Master’s level management students achieve their potential, a potential driven by students being able to apply a critical perspective to their work.

And whilst higher education principles require graduates who are critically reflexive in their practice (QAA, 2014) capable of being future generators of sustainable value for business and society and to be working towards an inclusive and sustainable global economy (Principle 1 United Nations compact, PRME, 2007) we acknowledge the challenge this presents for academics in the context of changing expectations of business, employers, and society.

Academics are prompted to continuously consider their practice and learn from others new ways to improvise and innovate with fellow academics.

Recent changes in the HE landscape, most notably internationalisation and increased marketisation at taught postgraduate level have to some extent led to critical management education pedagogy being ‘squeezed’ out of the sector (Perriton and Reynolds, 2018 p532). Despite this there is now more than ever a need to develop critical thinking in our management learners as a way of addressing the challenges graduates face preparing to work in a complex global workplace.

Our starting point was reviewing literature around critical management education pedagogy (Reynolds, 1998, 1999a and 1999b; Perriton and Reynolds, 2018) and this provides the theoretical foundation for this research, in the context of developing Master’s level management students to think critically about research methods. In order to develop this critical edge to student learning it was essential to build in a collective approach, this was developed using the concepts of participative pedagogy (Elliott and Reynolds, 2014) action learning (Revans, 1983, 2017), reflection (Raelin, 2001) and critical reflexivity (Cunliffe, 2004). In essence, at the crux of the process was a focus on the questioning of assumptions related to both theory and practice, power relations and empowerment of learning (Perriton and Reynolds, 2018). However, there are some drawbacks to these models in relation to practice and how to do this and this is why we turned to Jazz. We borrowed from the metaphor of Jazz to explore how students could develop the skills of innovation and improvisation through a culture of collaboration, engaging in dialogue and developing trust.

Dennis (2015) encourages the application of the principles of Jazz to management education to promote collaboration with others, build trust, engage in dialogue, and develop innovative ways of supporting learning. Meyer and Shambu, (2010) explain how the Jazz analogy can be employed in the classroom to bring about a culture of creativity within teaching management students. They argue against the misconception that Jazz improvisation is about spontaneity when in reality it draws on years of experience, preparation and practice within an accepted structure. The ‘head melody’ is set out at the beginning, melodic improvisations are then based on and develop from the accepted structure. To end there is a restatement and return of the group to the ‘head melody’. This parallels teaching practice in critical management education pedagogy with time being dedicated at the beginning of each session to lay out the structure of

the class based around professorial lectures and the topic. Students are then, within this structure, invited to contribute and improvise ideas. Ideas are developed in supportive group learning sets. Sessions then conclude with a de-brief, or return to the 'head melody' to appreciate the improvisations and identify progress made. Meyer and Shambu (2010 p6) explain that employing improvisational practices in the classroom does not mean abandoning all structure and surrendering to the chaos and the flux of the moment' instead it is about 'firmly establishing a structure for each class session – just as a Jazz group would agree to perform a certain tune whose melody (its underlying structure) would be familiar to all group members'. The Jazz approach provides a space to express and develop ideas within a supportive group atmosphere to aid improvisation, radical dissent and creativity.

We draw on Reynolds (1999a) concept of critical management education pedagogy as an approach to teaching characterised by radical content and radical teaching methods, in the suggestion that critical approaches can support students to develop skills of criticality. We did this by adopting broad principles of action learning and group work. We felt it important to encourage students to reflect on different research methods as part of the module delivery. Reynolds (1999a) explains how critical management education pedagogy allows students the opportunity to form their own opinions on learning when supported and encouraged to participate in class through discussion and dialogue. Taking this approach can help to remove some of the hierarchical structures found in the 'traditional classroom', a classroom situation where academics are in control of the learning content and the learning process. We were encouraged by the work of Elliott and Reynolds (2014) in support of group work and action learning (Gray, 2007) as a way of helping students develop their skills of making learning more critical. Critical management education pedagogy, action learning and critical reflection are the focus of this research as the teaching team reflect on the delivery of the research module and developments in action learning as part of academic reflection and reflexivity.

Cunliffe (2016) supports Reynold's case for adopting critical management education pedagogy as a way of developing students' ability to critically reflect. Her approach to critical reflexivity, sees learning an embodied process, in which students learn about themselves in the context of others. This builds on Freire's (1970) work seeing education as a means of overcoming oppression and enabling students to construct for themselves their understanding of the world through learning from their own lived experience, (Freire, 1970 p2) This view was influential to the delivery team acknowledging that individuals think, act, and respond differently to

different contexts and different situations with students' ability to learn and reflect being dependent upon their unique value and belief system. It was essential to create a learning environment which allowed students to learn from their own experiences and from their interactions with others, learning that results from the embodiment of their ideas and their experiences of practice. That is not to say there is no place for academic models, principles and techniques, these help in providing contextual frameworks, however it is through application, analysis, and critical reflection that students learn. Hills and Thom (2005) also acknowledge the use of language and terminology and key factors creating a barrier in the teaching and learning process.

We experimented with action learning and group work to develop students' critical abilities in the context of research, utilising action learning based on Revans' framework. (Revans, 2017) According to Revans (2017)) action learning embodies an approach based on learning from and with each other through discriminating questioning, fresh experiences, and reflective insight. Smith (2001) supports Revans on the value of reflection to the action learning process offering the opportunity to integrate '*rule based knowledge (P) with experiential knowledge (Q) through reflection* (p35). Schon (2016) confirms the importance of action to learning in the context of reflection on both 'in action' or 'on action, during the event or after the event. We encouraged students to challenge the Professorial presenters in class and also asked them to later reflect on their learning from this experience in a learning journal. Gray (2007) continues to support the use of reflection and action learning as a way of helping students apply concepts to practice, one in which students challenge existing norms and the social, cultural and political status quo, through engaging in dialogical processes, as part of a group/action learning experience. In our context this took place in the teaching classroom working with postgraduate learners.

Our approach to adopting critical management education pedagogy into our teaching practices for this module comprised the broad principles of action learning (Dilworth, 2010). This was done through encouraging students to question the source of knowledge, i.e. knowledge of experts - our professors - and we encouraged students to question and reflect on the process in relation to research methods, working in a supportive group learning environment. We referred to writers in the field of management education to support the use of group work when working with international PG students. Elliott and Reynolds, (2014) support group work as a way of enhancing student involvement and interest in the subject, as well as seeing this as a way of

encouraging students to learn from each other's ideas and experiences. Gabriel and Griffiths (2008) point out how self-directed and action learning can offer students insight into managing themselves and managing others. However, these are by no means easy or comfortable experiences with Baker and Clark (2010) emphasising the importance of preparation and opportunities for students to reflect on their experience. Baker and Clark (2010) found that students felt working in groups improved their cross cultural understanding but they noted also that often lecturers felt inadequately prepared for participative type group work. Despite support for the use of action learning and group work as a way of enhancing student learning, we acknowledge the challenges for academic staff and students developing alternative critical pedagogies, in the context of management education, in order to support international students' learning. And as Currie (2007) confirms learning that involves change can cause discomfort however this is a necessary part of the learning process.

Reynolds (1999a) provided a starting point in developing pedagogy based on radical content delivered via radical learning processes with action learning and group work the vehicle to support students to develop greater criticality in their work. Although it has to be said though that Giroux's (1981) and Reynolds, (1999a) distinction between content and process radicals highlights the problem the would-be critical management educator inherits, in that although each position has provided a critical alternative to a traditional approach, neither one does so completely and this was the case in our research. In that if we assume ourselves as the content radicals then we still use and have use for traditional processes and conventional classroom practice to disseminate subject matter whereas the process radicals may have developed a less hierarchical pedagogy, its supporting theory is often inadequate for the analysis of complex social and organisational processes.

In either case the separation of content from processes is, as Giroux (1981) points out a rather crude pedagogical simplification and as we found in our research the model needs something in between for it to work in practice. We found the Jazz Metaphor helpful in applying the theories around critical management pedagogy in practice.

Our aim in applying these conceptual frameworks was to support students develop a deeper and more critical understanding of the nuances of Master's level research methods that they could apply to their own research in the context of contemporary business issues. Mughal et al (2018) confirm facilitation is essential when the expectation is for students to challenge the

professors delivering the guest speaker sessions. Challenging professors is a concept often at odds with anything international students have experienced before, academics encouraging students to question guest speakers' practice is for many a whole new way of working, one that takes time to adopt.

The conceptual frameworks adopted around critical management education pedagogy, action learning and group work were seen a way of encouraging postgraduate students to develop skills of critical thinking in the context of the research module. Furthermore, drawing on the Jazz metaphor of improvisation, collaboration and trust and the need to engage in collegiate dialogue we were able to experiment more widely with our hybrid approach to pedagogy. However, to some extent, noting students' initial confusion with this new way of learning, which was apparent from early student feedback, it would have been easier to give students what they expected and revert to traditional teaching methods.

Methodology

The research takes a case study view (Rigg and Trehan, 2004 p153) adopting a combined auto-ethnographic (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015) and reflective approach to consider changes made and whether in the opinion of the teaching staff the vision was being achieved or at least being moved forward. The use of combined philosophies adds greater validity to the research process (Feather, 2012) given that the research is based on the reflections of three academics involved in the development and delivery over 24 months. As such it is important to recognise these reflections are flawed by the subjective nature of interpretation and evaluation. However, that does not remove the validity of the reflections which are influenced by individual epistemological and ontological beliefs (Saunders et al, 2009) and our perceptual filters (Voros, 2005).

Although the study follows a level of fluidity through a range of different students, it remains a single case study (Yin, 2014) as the three participants of the study are consistent and as such are the focus of the study through their reflections. The designation of this as a case study is compatible with the ideas of Ridder et al (2014) who comment on the flexibility of case study philosophies. Despite this however, there remains a need for ensuring that the research has both practical relevance and academic rigour (Saunders et al, 2009).

Data Collection takes the form of the reflections of staff in an auto-ethnographic (Easterby-Smith et al, 2015) account reflecting on the success or not of the initial achievement after 24 months of the new module. The three academics consider the key areas identified within the literature review. The subsequent reflections have then been analysed and appropriate themes developed, which allowed the authors to provide key learning and development points. Open manual coding was used to create links between the three reflections.

Findings and Analysis

Self-reflection and critical reflexivity provided three academic staff (AS) the opportunity to learn from involvement at different stages in the delivery of the module and its ongoing development. The themes developed from these reflections are the student journey, from confusion to acceptance and finally engagement, how we as academic staff felt initially: how our confidence developed in utilising critical management education pedagogy and generally our learning points along the way and how by drawing on the Jazz metaphor of improvisation, collaboration, trust, dialogue, and innovation we brought about a culture of creativity within teaching.

This research builds on the debate around the problematic nature of much teaching and research in the university business school and adopts a critically reflective stance by academics through observing practice. This is critically reflective whereby the academics enter into a subjective account of how they believe the module has developed over time, a process of questioning our assumptions and ‘taken-for-granted’ and reflecting on the wider social, political, and cultural processes within which the experience takes place, namely a postgraduate international business management classroom. Our concerns as management educators and our commitment to critical management education pedagogy as a form of supporting develop students’ critical thinking and critical writing skills prompted us to reflect, evaluate and develop a critically reflexive stance on the operation of the module over two academic years of delivering research methods.

We found that by engaging in a collegiate dialogue with each other, innovating, supporting, and sharing ideas and at times having clearly defined roles and at other times drawing on our experiences to improvise. And by taking the time to learn from new materials, being open to

learn from each other and demonstrating tolerance for mistakes and being prepared to mutually respect each other's opinions all helped support the move to a new teaching pedagogy.

These are some of the reflections drawn from the three academics involved in the development and ongoing delivery of the module.

Initial shock and confusion

"I understood their [student] confusion when encountering features of critical management education pedagogy knowing they had come from a learning background characterised by traditional teaching approaches, confusion with new ways of learning and new types of assessment involving presentations, discussion and dialogical processes. I was therefore unsurprised by student's initial confusion and initial reluctance to engage in classroom activities when presented with teaching methods such as action learning and reflection, practices largely unfamiliar to them. I realised students would need support in helping them engage with the module and prepare for the assessment presentations and reflective portfolios" (A1).

Improved confidence over time: Students and staff

We concurred how over time both students and we as academic staff gained confidence with critical management education pedagogy.

"What was clear, part way through the module, was the difference in confidence and ability of these students in comparison to the previous years' students, the previous year's students had experienced a traditional learning approach. This was particularly evident during the first formative assessment, the group presentation" (A1). This was supported by A3.

"Though facilitated, the learning sets worked well, stimulating self-directed learning and critical reflexivity and as time went on the students increasingly took the lead in the discussions and were independently critical of the professorial presentations" (A3).

Development of critical thinking and application of theory to practice

It was clear from student responses to questioning that our research participants were able to think through their answers more critically than their predecessors had done. This encouraged us to persevere with the new approach.

“In the early stages the students were generally confused about how the module was delivered, i.e. the teaching and learning process, but as the module went on there was a lot of engagement and the students seemed to enjoy it. Terminology was one of the key issues as students didn’t really know or understand some of the more technical research terms used and although the easy answer was always to say look it up, they often needed greater explanation” (A2)

Academic staff feelings: Tutor and Student Dissonance

The literature (Reynolds, 1999a, 1999b; Cunliffe, 2002, 2004; Currie, 2007) confirms that adopting critical management education pedagogy, both in content and process, can be challenging for academics as well as for students, Academic 1 and 2 supported this view.

“The first term was challenging but we acknowledged this openly with our students, reassuring students that at times they may find some sessions confusing however we believed that the results from adopting this approach would be beneficial particularly preparing them for work in a complex and fast changing workplace” (A1)

“Initially there was somewhat an alien feel to the delivery and there were times that I felt less in control than I would have liked. In the early stages not knowing if students would read the articles could be quite worrying, as it was difficult to have a discussion if no one has read them” (A2).

Furthermore, A3 shares a reluctance to engage in critical management education pedagogy based on experiences of teaching via the more traditional methods.

“I approached the module format with some scepticism, due to my traditional experience in teaching research, and experience in supervising iteration one student dissertations. While some students were enthusiastic in challenging presenters most, especially international students, were not confident in challenging professor’s ideas. It was often left to the tutors to fill this gap in asking critical questions of presenters and stimulating questioning. However,

the professorial presentations were clearly stimulating students and were based on the researcher's own experience of conducting research and their willingness to share and discuss their success and failings" (A3).

In terms of impact however we can see that academics were enthused to find that students found the experience of learning on this module challenging yet engaging and contributing to the development of critical thinking, critical analysis, as well as improved results.

Impact

"Discussion with students suggested they had enjoyed the module using words like stimulating, challenging and helpful, but for me the big change was a 2% increase in the average mark for this module over its predecessor module. Importantly the dissertation module average mark also rose by just over 2% but most significant was the actual written dissertation component of the module rose by over 5% suggesting much of the initial aims of the change were being met" (A2).

Discussion

As academics and practitioners, it was important for us to develop deeper understanding of how to improve the criticality of student work, and in adopting a group learning approach as part of the delivery we were able to see students develop greater criticality in their research projects. Reynolds (1999a) work on critical management education pedagogy acknowledges the importance of radical content, in the sense that the professorial presentations were open to challenge, and radical processes, i.e. group learning sets through which students could challenge the professors. Fundamental to this was the need to break down the power relationship between staff and students leading to a propensity to engage and empower the students to provide opinion and debate on key issues.

We acknowledge that expecting students to challenge professors on their research may be seen by some to reinforce the power relations between professor and students and negate any attempts to break down the barriers associated with this approach. However, in utilising a group learning approach students have the chance to develop questions in their learning sets and through working collaboratively questions the professors as a collective rather than individual.

Professorial presentations and group learning provided an alternative way of learning, encouraging students to challenge the professors and break down the power relations previously found in the traditional classroom. Wilmott (1997 cited in Rigg and Trehan, 2004) supports this way of learning.

Rigg and Trehan (2004) confirm action learning is a way of seeking to address the power asymmetries of traditional teacher/learner relationships. And in taking an experiential learning approach to critically reflect on what had taken place we as tutors were able to work with our students as participants and co learners facilitating the learning sets.

Rigg and Trehan's (2004) work on action learning encourages students to make the connections between their learning and their own experience in development of criticality in their thinking, however this can have implications for not only the individual concerned, the group but also the tutor. There is however the need for space for learning from and about emotion, power and diversity which needs to be factored into the equation (Rigg and Trehan, 2004) but as some may argue (Currie and Knights. 2003; Cunliffe, 2016) in order for students to achieve the transformatory potential to becoming critical thinkers and critical reflectors then some disruption is necessary and as such despite some staff (and student) discomfort there is a compelling case for adopting action learning and group work as a form of critical management education pedagogy.

Utilising the Jazz metaphor, we can see that at times there is a need for improvisation, is this then merely a form of radical content and radical process? The core competencies of a successful Jazz group are collaboration and trust (Dennis, 2015). Is this what was required of academic staff and of postgraduate students in developing and delivering this module and postgraduate students in undertaking it? Is this where the Jazz metaphor helps to understand the need to engage in 'collegiate dialogue' (Dennis, 2015 p967) with each other? The suggestion is that if we accept the Jazz metaphor then we can understand how as a collective group of academics, professors and students, we can work collaboratively to engage with the learning materials i.e. the research papers, in a more radical and critical way and in doing so we acknowledge issues of power, emotion and diversity, we learn from each other and encourage each other to reach new and transformational understanding of research methods and approaches.

Despite compelling evidence for implementing critical management education pedagogy and the use of action learning sets (Reynolds, 1999a; Cunliffe, 2004; Trigg and Rehan, 2004) we accept there is limited evidence around implementation and implications for tutors. There are questions around whether tutors should continue with introducing action learning and group work as a form of critical management education pedagogy (Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Currie and Knights, 2003) when it is acknowledged the dissonance it can cause for students and for staff. However, if we return to our Jazz metaphor and the need for improvisation in that *there is always something fresh to be unleashed from its melodic and harmonious foundations* (Dennis, 2015 p967), the ability to engage in dialogue with student peers, academic staff and professorial staff offers potential for developing transformational thinking, challenging the status quo and ‘taken for granted’ around research methods for management students.

Despite the evidence of dissonance and discomfort acknowledged by staff and students in the early stages of delivering the module we acknowledged a certain level of disenchantment with traditional pedagogy remains, discomfort with critical management education pedagogy is clearly still a key concern for both staff and students. Rigg and Trehan, (2004) also confirm action learning and group work can create dissonance among participants when challenging the ‘taken for granted’ ideas but we agreed that discomfort for staff and students is essential to reaching the critical levels of learning. And despite the academic team’s concerns we took comfort in the views expressed by Currie and Knights (2003). Rigg and Trehan, (2004) and built on Cunliffe’s (2004) ‘inside out’ approach to learning, an approach rooted in personal experience and the creative and responsive way our identity, experiences and opportunities for action are shaped. Cunliffe’s (2004) ‘inside out’ approach resonated well with our philosophy for delivery of this module. Taking this approach helped students develop their own ideas, their own language and to go away and read more about parts of the guest speaker’s session that interested them and relate this learning to their individual research projects. It also helped students to respect the rights of others to speak, in understanding how our use of words orient responses and how our ways of relating impact on how we learn.

Despite the conceptual support for a critical approach to learning for postgraduate management students there are clearly issues for both students and academics in teaching utilising an action learning and group work approach as part of introducing critical management education pedagogy. However, from our observations of student performance and from student comments

the academic team agreed generally that critical management education pedagogy can support development of critical questioning, critical thinking and critical analysis and helps students develop the skills to synthesise key concepts in the context of their research investigations.

We found that introducing critical management education pedagogy is complex and challenging but we drew strength from the Jazz metaphor that improvisation, through collaboration, developing trust, engaging in dialogue and innovation were key factors in the success of the module. We wanted to share our reflections and observations based on interactions with students, professors and each other and see the continuous development of ideas generated by each cohort. This parallels with Jazz where some 'experiments' burn brightly but are short lived while other constructions become 'standards' and are used again (Meyer and Shambu, 2010). The approach aims to draw out new contributions from all participants. This creates problems. It is not easy. Some crave security in a more structured traditional or conventional environment while some want more free-form experimentation and the removal of boundaries. There are tensions as in a Jazz group. It can work, or not. This research found that students, and often staff, could find the process challenging. Some rejected it, but we were encouraged that overall participants found it stimulating and motivating and the results, measured in engagement and a more rewarding experience as well as results.

Despite the efforts utilising action learning and group work, many students found applying concepts in presentation work and group discussions challenging. Some students complained that when listening to presentations they could be frustrated as they could not comprehend what the researchers were talking about. This reaction varied among students and for some was an initial reaction and they adapted to the content and teaching approach as time went on. We feel that students have to be pushed to overcome the fear of criticising those in authority but once they realise that this is acceptable, and even beneficial in developing their knowledge and understanding, they overcome their fear and reticence.

We found evidence of improved engagement in learning about research because of taking a more critical approach to pedagogy but feel this approach to learning needs to be combined with traditional teaching approaches to maximise student learning and benefit all students. Achieving a balance between action learning and group work and a taught textbook approach is 'work-in-progress'. However, students seemed to gain great insights into how researchers

identify their research topics and ideas, and in the process gained greater understanding and respect for the research process.

As with developments in Jazz there was continual improvisation, adaptation and change with changes in tutors, guest professor presenters and student group composition and numbers. The guest professor presentations encouraged students to question and criticise. Students questioned speakers and then reflected individually, through reflective diaries, and group learning sets stimulating critical engagement and ideas which contributed to dissertation success and improvement in critical understanding. The researchers found that prescriptive taught 'how to' research sessions were less effective. The changes in tutors, or performers, affected how well the module worked each year. When the tutors 'get it' and act more like Jazz improvisers than classical teachers it works (Dennis, 2015). When tutors did not 'get it' they tended to leave the module. This parallels the Jazz experience where no repeat 'performance' is identical. With changes in the size and ethnic makeup each year, different 'compositions' perspectives and cultures emerge (Gioia, 1998). Often students emerged who 'get it' and go on to enthuse and engage other students.

We can see from the literature that there is a case for pursuing a pedagogy of radical content and radical processes as a way of supporting students to become critical thinkers. This is a skills requirement for every Master's level student in the UK (QAA Benchmark statements for Business Management, 2015). How this is done in practice i.e. the empirical work is inconclusive and despite a commitment to critical management education pedagogy over the last 20 -30 years Perriton and Reynolds (2018) continue to call academics to revisit their pedagogy as a result of the current climate. In that they suggest critical management education pedagogy is being squeezed out of the sector at PG Taught level due to internationalisation and increasing marketisation.

We seek in our paper to explore how we adopted the principles of critical management education pedagogy to support an increasingly international market of students drawing on our reflections of the critical management education pedagogy model (Reynolds, 1999a) and the metaphor of Jazz. In planning our delivery, we implemented a hybrid model utilising pedagogy of radical content in the form of a selection of academic papers; radical processes in the form of guest speaker presentations and the use of action learning, group work and reflection initially in the form of student led action learning set style groups, with a commitment to improvisation

whenever and wherever this was needed. This was particularly noted when we realised a need for academic staff to facilitate the action learning set (Murghal et al, 2018). By incorporating a final part to the module involving traditionally taught research methods, the need to underpin critical thinking with scaffolding that Jazz players require, ie an understanding and ability to read music.

Drawing on Perriton and Reynolds (2018) recent call for the critical management education community to review the basis of its critical work with students, acknowledging particularly when the classroom remains the site for criticality, these academic reflections on teaching approaches developed over 2 years observation add to the debate in the following way. Key challenges remain for both students and staff, specifically the ones observed related to international students and their confusion and concerns adapting to a critical management education pedagogy and the challenges for academic staff and professors working to support these students in this new way of learning for students and for staff. Once students and staff adapted to this new way of learning other benefits were observed, one of these being the self-directed nature of the student population, how through peer support students were able to help each other. Also, module results saw year on year improvements and anecdotally staff cited better engagement of students in the research process. These students found it difficult initially adapting to a critical management education pedagogy but with perseverance most commented that the approach had helped them develop more critical research skills. Currie (2007) supports the concerns students have adapting to critical management education pedagogy that learners often experience ‘significant anxiety when dependency moves from the lecturer to the learner themselves’ (Currie 2007 p549) although he cautions not to consider learner anxiety a negative outcome disruption to a certain degree can facilitate learning.

A further theme arising from the reflections and from observing responses of the learners relates to the concern’s students have adapting to forms of assessment they are unfamiliar with, so their anxiety is not just caused by the different teaching and learning processes, i.e. the guest speaker presentations, but by the form of assessment i.e. the reflective research file, group presentations and individual presentation of their research proposal. The idea of the reflective portfolio is often new to many of the learners. Hills and Thom (2005) highlighted that international student often struggled to understand the term assignment, students are confused by what we mean by an assignment and even if they understand the requirements of the assignment, they are often confused by the format required to present their work. Hills and

Thom (2005) suggest academic staff also need support understanding the challenges for international students adapting to critical management education pedagogy, noting the need for extensive support strategies, academic and non-academic when helping international students make the transition to the United Kingdoms Higher Education Institution's (UKHEI) teaching and learning processes.

It was therefore important to note the need for extensive reassurance for students helping them understand the nature of the assessments and to support academic staff understand the challenges for international students adapting to a UKHEI as well as engaging in critical management education pedagogy. The module was about delivery utilising critical content and critical assessment processes creating a non-hierarchical learning environment underpinned by critical reflective practice. Engaging in this process created 'pedagogical shock' for our postgraduate students and was at times uncomfortable for staff. For the purposes of this paper Pedagogical Shock is defined as "the experience that a student may have when moving from one pedagogical approach to an alternative approach". This may be more enhanced when students move from a traditional didactic approach to a more critical approach. We therefore feel that students' initial response to being introduced to a critical management education pedagogy is that of 'Pedagogical Shock'. Notably for international students perhaps more accustomed to rote learning the pedagogical shock may be more extreme but it is no less prevalent in home students.

A further partner in the Master's level classroom were the visiting professors who were also required to engage with the pedagogical approach adopted. Senior researchers/professors had to be confident with criticality from students and academic staff in presenting and reflecting on their own and others work. Briefing them on the modules pedagogical intentions was paramount to the success of the presentations in that they had to be prepared to be open to criticism and challenge of their work.

What became evident as the module progressed was the relevance and importance of peer support to students in developing their critical understanding. There were two cohorts in each academic year, a September and January intake. In the first term students were not part of a group where peer support of more experienced students were able to help them adjust to this new way of teaching and new way of learning. In so much as in the second term, the new intake of January start students were able to benefit from hearing accounts of peers from the previous

term. Subsequently the following intake of September start students were able to benefit from hearing accounts of peers from the previous January start cohort and so on. This allowed for peer assisted learning and reflection. From the January start onwards examples of previous student work was available for incoming cohorts, also assisting new students in building their confidence in critical management education pedagogy, helping students become more reflective about their own development and learning needs, supporting the development of the critical communities of learning. Peer support can be formal or informal. Bamford (2008) reports on the success of a peer mentoring scheme adopted in a post-1992 university as a means of supporting international students engage in learning processes. This was certainly found to work during the research period by encouraging informal peer support – new and students 6 months into their 1-year Master’s programme - benefit from the process.

A further factor observed by the academic team was how developing the group learning sets from self-facilitated to academic facilitated learning sets improved student engagement in the module and improved student learning outcomes. The dialogue that ensued as part of the facilitated learning sets, with academic staff questioning and probing students about the research papers and professorial presentations, stimulated student reflections, on not just their choice of words and worldviews but to question why they would choose to use a particular research method. The facilitation of action learning sets suggested by Warhurst (2011) and Mughal et al (2018) confirming that facilitating group learning sets a positive move in the development of this module, and deeper criticality was valued by students and staff alike. Academic staff observed that facilitated learning sets helped students learn to critique other researcher’s techniques and to relate learning from this approach to their own research.

Conclusion

Drawing on the Jazz metaphor, and the work of Dennis (2015), Holbrook (2015) and Meyer and Shambu (2010), we offered an innovative approach which supported us in reviewing our ways of thinking about how management education could be delivered. This gave us the confidence into openly and honestly share our reflections and introduce new pedagogical practices to support learners in becoming radical and critical thinkers, essential in the contemporary business environment.

There are clearly challenges for adopting an action learning group work approach for participants and academics. For international students this involves moving from a prior educational system in which teachers teach and students learn, to one in which students shape and influence not only what they learn but how they learn. For academics introducing critical management education pedagogy this can be equally daunting when the base of power in the classroom moves from the academic to the students, particularly in respect of students' willingness and abilities to partake and lead the discussions resulting from the professorial speakers.

Nevertheless, it remained a strategic choice of the teaching team to progress the concept of group learning in the delivery of the new MBA and MSc modules. Fundamentally this research seeks to further develop and reflect on our approach to developing a critical management education pedagogy and whether it was meeting the under-pinning principles of the redesign. Experience and reflection on the module also confirm that the Jazz metaphor remains valid in examining and understanding the nature and complexity and value of organizational and pedagogical improvisation. The introduction of this approach brought about 'Pedagogical Shock' which may be considered a new concept as students move towards a different pedagogical experience than has previously been experienced.

Implications for Practice

While this paper provides only a snapshot of responses from three academics, it provides an interesting reflection on changing an individual's approach to learning and their mindset. The approach provided opportunity for learners to develop skills in a supportive environment and work collectively to enhance their thinking skills. In particular, the change in approach found new ways of doing things through reaction – challenging and questioning – with links to a critical management education pedagogy.

Progression from undergraduate to postgraduate study levels is often taken for granted, the need to change our teaching approach and strategy is often a neglected area of thinking. This is as much true of home students as well as those from overseas. This changing process which we have termed 'Pedagogical Shock' should be considered in the design and development of postgraduate provision.

Areas for further research

In observing and reflecting on student reactions to being introduced to critical management education pedagogy we noted a new phenomenon we termed ‘pedagogical shock’. We feel this is an area for further exploration. Are there aspects of Jazz improvisation that management education can learn from to address issues arising from ‘pedagogical shock’ associated with adopting critical management education pedagogy for postgraduate international students?

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