Critical Pedagogy in Sport Management Education: rationale, issues and implications for practice

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(NB This is a condensed version of a longer article which is shortly to appear in another journal – Ed.)

Rationale

The drive for greater globalisation, the revolution in social media, the increasing ease in accessing knowledge, the growing consumerism, a disaffected sector of unemployed youth, and an increase in such social problems as injustices, inequalities, and anti-social behaviours brings into focus the need for education programmes throughout the world to seriously address such issues (Culpan & Wigmore). Light and Dixon believe that traditional approaches to teaching and learning that view learning as a simple process of internalising a fixed body of knowledge are outdated and no longer relevant in a modern society (Light and Dixon, 2007). They express the view that the traditional emphasis on content, or what we feel our students should learn, has thus become less important than the need to help them learn how to learn and to think critically about both content and process.

The reaction against such traditional teaching methods within the context of rapidly changing social conditions in developed societies has led progressive educators to rejuvenate critical pedagogy as a possible way forward. The intention of the paper is to contribute to the debate on the place of critical pedagogy in education, particularly management education, and specifically in the field of sport management, to ensure
the continuing relevance and effectiveness of sport management programmes in the context of the rapidly changing social, cultural and economic conditions.

Definitions of Pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy

Pedagogy is "a deliberate attempt to influence how and what knowledge and identities are produced within and among particular sets of social relations" (Giroux & Simon, 1989: 239). The practice of pedagogy therefore relates to the production of knowledge. McLaren (1993) suggests that critical pedagogy involves a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationship among classroom

teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society, and nation-state. It reflects an engagement with the world, and is more than just superficial contact with "others" and the "what is" that confronts individuals in their daily lives and establishes a relationship of respect, honesty and trust between teachers and students, employer and employee, provider and client, institutions and society (Freire, 1972).

In the language of critical pedagogy, the critical person is one who is empowered to seek justice and to seek emancipation. Not only is that person adept at recognizing injustice but, for critical pedagogy, that person is also moved to change it. Here critical pedagogy wholeheartedly takes up Marx's Thesis XI on Feuerbach: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Marx 1845/1977, 158). The fundamental aspect that is true to all critical pedagogies is a belief in the inter-relation between education and society, and a commitment to change in education and society to ensure greater social justice.

Management Education and Critical Pedagogy

Over the past two decades or more the context in which organisations have operated has changed radically as a result of globalisation, information technology, and economic and environmental crises (Whatley, 2005). In order to reflect the widening societal, political and corporate concerns regarding the impact of business decisions on the organisation, the community in which it operates, and indeed the inhabitants of our world, the calls for a re-examination of business school curricula have been growing (Berry, 2009; Natale & Sora, 2010). The scholarship of teaching and learning has received its fair share of the criticism, with some accusing it of lacking critique (Servage, 2009). There are those such as Barnes and Keleher (2006) that advocate the use of critical pedagogy to possibly provide students with a more comprehensive philosophical and historical basis for determining their own perspectives. These calls to change the business curricula have been accentuated by the growing concerns regarding the social, environmental, and financial sustainability of current forms of organisation (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Berry, 2009; Birnik & Billsberry, 2008).

Dehler, Welsh, and Lewis (2001) argued for the adoption of critical pedagogy by management educators not only in recognition of the profound shifts in competitiveness that have occurred in the business environment, but to better equip students as independent learners. Such a transformation in management education would require changes in educational roles, curricular content, and classroom practices to create a learning space that supported and encouraged students to engage in critical commentary (Dehler, Welsh, and Lewis, 2001). By creating an environment in which power in the classroom is de-centred, disciplinary borders become permeable, and issues are problematized, the attendant capacity of

producing students with a capacity for "greater sensitivity to the emancipatory and transformational possibilities in the future" would increase (Dehler, Welsh, and Lewis, 2001).

The tradition of critical pedagogy is already well established in adult education literature and practice, using various Habermasian, Marxist, Freirian, feminist and post-structural perspectives. The potential transformation creates "more just, free and equitable conditions through an integrative combination of critical analysis and collective action" (Fenwick, 2003). In the context of management education the intent of critical theory is: "to challenge the legitimacy and counter the development of oppressive institutions and practices . . . [seeking] to highlight, nurture and promote the potential of human consciousness to reflect critically upon such practices" (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1996, p. 13).

There are, of course, many unresolved contradictions of management practice and critical pedagogy. Management education and practice is essentially conservative, where survival, profit, shareholder interests, and control of the productive capacity of workers are the key business motives (Fenwick, 2003). Critical theory, on the other hand, is fundamentally radical, advocating human emancipation through dismantling current systems of ideology, control and production that are embedded in globalized capitalism (Fenwick, 2003). Reconciling these contradictions, the transformative impulse of critical pedagogy with the actual practice of management, is still an elusive dream for critical management educators.

This is not to say that a critical management perspective has no place within management education. Transformation can be subtle and remain relevant and progressive. It can be initiated through a simple experiential exercise in which continuous reflection is encouraged and the 'bubble' of business students' 'reality' widened (Dart, 2008). The challenge for management educators is how to position their teaching to enable a larger number of business students (and educators) to experience such transformation. At a time when management education and business in general is under international scrutiny, critical management pedagogy should provides an opportunity to bring a degree of personal transformation in the management classroom. A critical pedagogical model will aid students begin to identify and examine the underlying value structures of knowledge and in so doing, they examine whether existing value arrangements and assumptions are currently appropriate and valid.

Sport Management and Critical Pedagogy

Using the same principles as outlined by Belhassen and Caton, albeit in research related to tourism education, a critical pedagogy approach to the teaching of sport management would suggest an alternative to the traditional curriculum, in which students learn not just how to be effective managers in the sports industry, but how

to think about management as a social force (Belhassen & Caton, 2011). In other words, they view the goal of management education not simply as a means to solve management problems, but rather as a starting point from which to address management as the problem that is to be analyzed and understood (Parker, 2002; Roberts, 1996).

Using a critical pedagogical approach in sport management teaching does not mean that all formal teaching has to be abandoned or that this approach is appropriate to all topics. It is most effective when integrated into the sport management curricula. Habermas (1978) argued that three fundamental interests underlie the human drive for knowledge production: firstly, "an interest in understanding and controlling the world around us, produces instrumental reason"; secondly, "an interest in understanding and connecting with our fellow human beings, entail(ing) a search for expression and meaning-making that constitutes a communicative or hermeneutic interest"; and thirdly, "an emancipatory interest in freeing ourselves of our constraints" Dialogue in small groups and plenary sessions is the key for this type of analysis of personal experience (Belhassen & Caton, 2011).

By exposing students to contemporary issues in sport management that relate to various conceptions of social justice, economic priorities, and environmental sustainability would allow them to debate and critique different perspectives on these issues to forge their own understandings and moral commitments. Thus, rather than take the present state of modern global capitalism for granted, students could be encouraged to analyze how the current system enables or constrains particular outcomes, and potentially consider alternatives (Belhassen & Caton, 2011).

Broadening the sport management curricula in ways like those discussed above essentially invites dialogue about values, power interests, and desirable ends back into the conversation, thus allowing students to reflect critically, as free thinkers, on the kind of world they want to build (Belhassen & Caton, 2011). As such, students are awakened to humanity's unique endowment of moral reasoning capacity with a revitalized social imagination that can be engaged to help bring about transformative ends (Freire, 1998; McLaren & Farahmandpur, 2005; Nussbaum, 1997). For example, a major concern of critical pedagogy is emancipation from unjust and inequitable practices and these social ills are aspects of sport management that lend themselves to open and honest dialogue.

By encouraging sport management students to discuss discrimination in sport, which is pervasive on and off the field of play, such as on the basis of gender, sexual preference, race and ethnicity, religion, skin color, disability, and age, solutions may be uncovered. Elite professional sports offer a poor model for sport in an educational context (Kirk, 2004) with cheating, drug use, abuse of athletes, the celebration of hegemonic masculinity, and the corrupting power of money all contributing to undermine the moral value of this form of human endeavour.

These issues are of major significance when we come to consider sport management education since we need to be clear about which aspects of the amorphous, complex, and contradictory community of practice of sport we wish to reproduce in our educational institutions, communities, and society in general (Kirk and Kinchin, 2003). Viewed through a critical pedagogical lens, sport offers both a medium for the development of McIntyre's (1985) virtues of justice, courage, and honesty and also a vehicle for young people to critique corrupted forms of sport.

Conclusion

In the past, there has been very little interest within the sport management literature in the issue of pedagogy, and even less in critical pedagogy. Given recent dramatic social changes and their impact on how young people learn, it is vital for sport management educators to critically examine existing practices within the sports industry (Light & Dixon, 2007). Sport management education must now progress beyond an approach that simply focuses on internalising a set body of knowledge, to developing graduates who can meaningfully contribute to practice (Papamarcos, 2005). Developing artificial problem solving assignments such as case studies and creating opportunities for dialogue may represent a constructive beginning to providing students with opportunities to expand their knowledge set and develop real-world skills such as critical thinking and analysis. Implementing a more critical approach in sport management pedagogy can, at the very least, encourage the proliferation of more diverse potential solutions to problems and can add philosophical depth to management training in an era in which academics seek to professionalise the practice (Khurana & Nohria, 2008).

At best, the adoption of critical pedagogy by sport management educators may instill in future managers an awareness of their power to shape the kind of world in which they want to live, engaging them in the project of expanding social justice, and equipping them to deal more productively with the realities of the workplace and the limits of their profession. The roots of critical pedagogy may have been in the Marxist movement, but far from seeking to undermine sport management as a profession or an academic field, it is better viewed as an agitating and enlightening influence that seeks to improve management education and practice by inducing reflexivity and by questioning taken-for-granted assumptions. It's inclusion in university curricula carries intellectual, pedagogical, ethical, and professional added values that traditional approaches lack (Light & Dixon, 2007).

Rather than leading students to believe that sport management education effectively places the tools of control in their waiting hands, academia would be better serving them with educational preparation that cultivates more critical understandings of social systems, such that students reconcile themselves to the limits of their own power and "instead begin to develop the habits of mind and action consistent with the reality of organizational interdependencies" (Roberts, 1996). Such a view

restores human agency, including moral agency, to those who seek to work as managers and leaders in the sports industry.

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