

# Critical pedagogy for teaching HRM in the context of social change

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper considers the imperatives of human resource management (HRM) studies in the context of contemporary South Africa. The authors draw on critical management studies (CMS) and the principles of emancipatory education to inform their argument for a critical and relevant HRM curriculum and associated teaching and learning approaches. The authors propose that the content and processes of HRM education must prepare students for critical participation in the contemporary South African society and workplace. The discussion outlines the rationale for the study, the specific prompts for its initiation, the theoretical framework of CMS, and Freire's concept of emancipatory education.*

**Keywords:** critical management studies, emancipatory education, human resources management, criticality, ethics

## INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The rationale for this paper emerged from debates on the purpose of higher education and, specifically, the purpose of business education within the context of the current global financial crisis. Over the past two decades, the debate about the purposes of university education has intensified (Barnett, 2005). Multiple stakeholders contend vociferously for particular priorities in university education and for certain agendas. Contributors to the discussion include governments, employers, university leaders, academics, and students. Contestation about the goals of university education has been fuelled by significant changes in the sector, such as mass higher education, internationalisation, technological developments, and reduction in government financial support and rises

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in student fees. Additionally, the rapidity of change in contemporary society has compelled the higher education sector to try and redefine and articulate its usefulness and purpose. The pressure to demonstrate relevance is exacerbated in professional disciplines such as management, because of its immediate and direct relationship to employers and future work opportunities.

The literature on the role of business education debates the purpose and practice of business education (Fenwick, 2005; Hault and Perret, 2011; Islam, 2012; Moosmayer, 2011; Pellisery, 2013; Spicer et al., 2009), yet South African academia's participation in the literature and debates remains largely absent. The Global Foundation for Management Education (GFME) published a series of essays in 2010, attempting to engage with the role of management education within the context of the global financial crisis. Scholarly reflections on the global financial crisis (Das, 2011; Davies, 2010; Stiglitz, 2010) suggest that perhaps a new and more critical approach towards business education is required. As Adler et al. (2007:1) contended, critical management studies have profound consequences for changing management practices. At its core, CMS do not focus on the

*... personal failures of managers nor the poor management of specific firms, but the social injustice and environmental destructiveness of the broader social and economic systems that these managers and firms serve and reproduce.*

Instead, CMS encourages a management studies education that is concerned with social justice, equitable and fair human resources practices, concern for the environment, and the consequences of unethical business practices.

Adam Jones, writing in the Guardian, in 2009, asked, "Are business schools responsible for the financial crisis? Whilst such a question may be blunt, and clearly the answer to such a question needs to be nuanced, it does raise the spectre of what exactly is happening in business education at universities. Are the courses on social corporate responsibility and ethics in business merely 'add-ons' and peripheral to mainstream business

curricula? More so, where are the components for a more critical perspective in business curricula? What does a critical business studies education entail, and what does this mean for the business studies academic?

South Africa is not viewed as having a critical management studies tradition or movement. This paper is an attempt to spearhead the debate on the role of CMS in the classroom.

Our objectives are as follows:

- To understand how CMS and emancipatory education can inform a critical approach to teaching and learning in human resources management education at a tertiary level; and
- To explore how this may operate in practice.

The authors reflect on these objectives in the context of HRM education in contemporary South Africa. The paper proposes that HRM educators must prepare students for critical participation in a volatile and dynamic workplace that is beset by challenges that were inherited from the Apartheid era and the uncertainties and tensions attendant to the new democracy. The term *critical participation* was chosen deliberately to emphasise the need to develop practitioners who are not simply agents of business, but who are equipped to interrogate the social, political, and ethical values that underlie business practices and discourses. Corresponding to this goal, the paper argues for an HRM curriculum and teaching and learning approaches that help to nurture the attributes of reflection, discernment, critique, and evaluation.

In the ensuing discussion, these questions about the content and processes of HRM education are considered in an exploratory manner. The exploration is located in the ideas of CMS and emancipatory education, and the specific personal and political prompts for the study are identified. Supported by the framework of CMS and emancipatory education, the paper outlines a proposal for reconceptualising the curriculum, teaching and learning approaches, and assessment strategies in HRM education.

The vision and strategies that are proposed are seen as the first stage of an extended project that aims to review current HRM education design and approaches, and offer approaches that will hopefully equip students for critical participation in the workplace.

This paper begins with the personal narrative of one of the authors (Shaun Ruggunan), who is currently lecturing in HRM at the School of Management, Information Technology and Public Governance, which is located in the College of Law and Management of UKZN. The paper outlines the contextual drivers that prompted initial stocktaking of the teaching and learning space that he was occupying and in which he was inducting students into the profession of HRM. In particular, he was concerned that students were being prepared in ways that did not equip them to contest business and organisational norms and their attendant hierarchies and inequities. From this recognition, the research idea to evaluate the critical component of the teaching of HRM at UKZN evolved.

In the next stage of this paper, the authors locate themselves in relation to ideas from and debate within the CMS literature. Informed by the educational theories of Freire, the authors articulate the criteria they will use to take stock of the current teaching of HRM at UKZN, and suggest alternatives. The paper concludes with a preliminary framework for a curriculum, together with teaching and learning approaches, that, it is contended, aligns with the development of social awareness, and equips students to become critically engaged and socially responsible practitioners. The authors argue that the learning space, and the place that teachers and learners occupy in it, need radical transformation in order to meet the challenges of HRM practice in the space that is contemporary South Africa.

## QUESTIONING THE LEARNING SPACE: SPECIFIC PROMPTS FOR THE STUDY

### Personal challenges in the teaching of HRM

The research investigation began with a literal change of space for Shaun when he moved from teaching Labour Studies in the School of Sociology and Social Science to Human Resource Management in the School of Management. Serendipitously, Shaun was a participant in another research project in higher education, which Dorothy Spiller was undertaking at UKZN, and their interview discussion led Shaun to reflect on his teaching and the nature of the students' learning. The interview provided a space for Shaun to verbalise what he did in his classroom, and to register a sense of loss in relation to his goals and approaches in his previous teaching. For example, this description of his current practice suggested how he had slipped into a production model of education that is analogous to the 'banking' model of education that Freire challenged (1970; 1993). He said:

*My relationship with students is governed by numbers. At honours level, I have 80 students in my class. I adopt an old-fashioned, traditional relationship, and base my teaching on the textbook (interview with Dorothy Spiller, June 2012).*

This comment immediately prompted a reflection on the contrast with his teaching in Labour Studies, which he described in dramatically different language: *When I taught industrial sociology, I wanted to **transform** students' ideas of what work is* (interview with Dorothy Spiller, June 2012).

Shaun subsequently contacted Dorothy to explore this shift in his personal teacher thinking and -behaviours, and the discussion then evolved into the idea of research into the way HRM was being taught at UKZN and the ideologies that these pedagogies implicitly or explicitly promoted. For Shaun, there were serious questions about the modifications to his teaching goals and behaviours and the potential implications for the education he was offering to students, and the messages

that he might be sending to students about the role of HRM practitioners in contemporary South Africa.

### **Political and social context and the teaching of HRM**

Shaun's personal uneasiness about the shift in his aspirations and practices as an educator was reinforced by contemporaneous events in South Africa. The dynamics of the South African context was exemplified in the fatal shooting of 42 miners in August 2012, at Marikana. This incident reverberated throughout the country in both the popular media and in academic circles. The massacre was equated to that of the infamous June sixteenth massacre of 1976, when Apartheid was at its height in South Africa. What made Marikana unique is that it was the first post-Apartheid protest that resulted in such high fatalities. It also represented a showdown between employees (miners) and mining capital. The popular media's discourse portrayed the miners as uncivilised, violent, and ungrateful for the employment offered to them by mining capital. Capital in South Africa was aggrieved, and was portrayed as the victim of this tragedy. No mention was made of the appalling living and working conditions of these miners, or the historical role of mining companies in supporting the Apartheid state, or violations of basic health and safety regulations in the industry.

Observing this discourse play out in the media and subsequently in academia, particularly in commerce and business schools, Shaun was alarmed that the debate in management studies failed to question or address the moral and ethical values that underpinned the prevailing discourses about the event. It led him to reflect on the absence of critical debate about underlying moral and ethical assumptions of HRM practice in the context of business studies. In stark contrast, colleagues in labour studies at UKZN were turning their classrooms into laboratories to investigate the political and moral economy of the mining industry in South Africa. It could be contended that such considerations are dealt with in courses about ethics; it is argued by the authors that such

stand-alone courses on ethics cannot provide a sustained learning experience that embeds the development of critiquing and questioning competencies. The Marikana massacre gave Shaun the impetus to disrupt the existing curriculum for an industrial relations module that he was lecturing within the School of Management, and to trial the inquiry-based approach that the authors advocate as a key principle for the design of a revised curriculum. The original syllabus for that course was a checklist of the different types of labour legislation required to be known by HRM practitioners. For Shaun, given the context of Marikana, HRM practitioners needed to be able to assess the veracity of claims made by capital, state, and the media that situated business as the victim and the miners as irrational agents. With this in mind, Shaun decided to adopt a CMS perspective in presenting this particular issue (Marikana). This process sparked a curiosity in Shaun to examine the hidden curriculum, as well as the overt curriculum, of HRM within his department.

These catalysts and Shaun's classroom experimentation generated further dialogue between the authors, and led to the gradual formulation of a research study that would involve investigating and evaluating current HRM teaching at UKZN, and eventually formulating different teaching and learning paradigms and specific strategies to enhance criticality in the teaching of HRM.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CMS AND EMANCIPATORY EDUCATION**

### **The CMS tradition**

The idea of critical management studies (CMS) is not new, and the notion that management students need to be educated to question prevailing business and organisational norms has been well articulated by CMS scholars and advocates (Alvesson and Wilmott, 1992; Cunliffe, Forray, and Knights, 2002; Dehler, 2010; Fenwick, 2005; Fournier and Grey, 2000;; Grey and Willmot, 2005). This push towards a values-based and

informed study of management has been given further impetus by the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management, which provides a framework for ethical behaviours in management (Forsay and Leigh, 2010).

To date, CMS has remained dominated by the work of British and American researchers, and, as such, both the theorisation and empirical evidence are limited to these contexts. Lately, Scandinavian academics have contributed to CMS. Notably, there is lack of contribution from academics from the developing world or academics studying the development of CMS within developing world contexts. The exception to this is the work by Gazi Islam (2007; 2012ab; 2013ab), who has published work on CMS and critical industrial psychology within the context of emerging economies like Brazil. More recently, Pellisery (2013) argued for the application of CMS within a developing world context.

CMS does not advocate educating students in a particular morality, but advocates educational approaches that help to develop students' capacity to interrogate the norms and values underlying prevailing economic discourses and business practices. CMS draws on a wide range of intellectual traditions such as Marxism, feminism, postmodernist thinking, and Freire's ideas about emancipatory education. While the focus of CMS will vary according to the

ideological underpinning, CMS scholars and teachers share a number of common values and approaches. People working under the CMS banner are committed to a form of management education that critiques the normative and prioritises human well-being and social equity over profitability and performance. Educators in the CMS tradition hope to contribute to the development of practitioners who are committed to the questioning of prevailing power imbalances and work towards social justice. Fournier and Grey (2000) identified three key components of CMS that have been widely used as benchmarks by CMS educators. These indicators are anti-performativity, denaturalisation, and reflexivity.

*Anti-performativity* refers to a critique of a focus on production and outputs, *denaturalisation* invites the regular and deliberate interrogation of processes that appear to be normal and natural, while *reflexivity* requires scrutiny of practice and behaviours and the assumptions on which they are based. All of these elements involve deliberate deconstruction and critical evaluation of the norm. From the perspective of the authors of this paper, these key elements are a natural corollary of Freire's belief in the importance of 'conscientization,' in the course of which learners become aware of the power structures of society, and acquire tools to contribute to social transformation (1970; 1993).

**TABLE 1: COMPONENTS OF CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES**

Component	Features
Anti-performativity	Management and organisations are not outcomes of the instrumental rationality of the knowledge produced by managers and management studies. Social relations should not be treated as "maximising output from a given input" (Grey and Willmot, 2005:6). To do so renders the politics and ethics of the organisation invisible. The primary function therefore of research and education in management studies is not to increase performance and productivity in a narrow, instrumentalist way.
Denaturalisation	The opening up and questioning of what has come to be seen as a given, unproblematic, and natural in management theory and practice. This includes hierarchy, dominant relations, managerial superiority (Alveson and Willmott, 1992:11-13; Grey and Willmot, 2005:5).
Reflexivity	This is an anti-positivist stance that posits that researchers and academics cannot be independent of the context in which they work and research. To be reflexive means to be aware of one's position (power, race, gender, status, class) for example) and how that position informs ones research agenda. As such, the knowledge one produces is not value free, and the critical academic acknowledges this.

Some opponents of CMS argue that an emphasis on critiquing poses the danger of it being a self-indulgent intellectual exercise that does not translate automatically into changes in behaviour. Indeed, even seasoned advocates of CMS such as Grey and Fournier recognise the potentially paralysing role of the non-performative stance of CMS practitioners. Grey and Fournier noted the preoccupation “with the grounds and righteousness of our critique which distracts us from engaging with organisational practices and participants” (2002:22). The present authors recognise that the current workplace in South Africa and the society it represents need critique that forces action and engagement, as opposed to intellectual carping from the side lines. As such, the authors argue that the refinement of CMS with the notion of *critical performativity* (Spicer, Alvesson, and Karreman, 2009) is a more useful conception that accommodates some of the realities of educational spaces and organisational contexts, and is more likely to bring about change. It is a conception that the authors have translated into their own term of *critical participation*. Spicer et al. (2009) defined *critical performativity* as “active and subversive intervention into managerial discourses and practices. This is achieved through affirmation, care, pragmatism, engagement with potentialities and a normative orientation” (2009:538). Spicer et al. (2009) have particular problems with the anti-performative approach of CMS, and argued that the notion of performativity needs to be redefined to highlight active engagement. Spicer et al. (2009) essentially argued for a change-from-within approach that includes engagement and dialogue with mainstream practitioners and theorists, and complements deconstruction with construction. In so doing, practitioners and theorists will be acknowledging “the contexts and constraints of management. It needs to take seriously the life-worlds and struggles of those engaged with it” (Spicer et al., 2009:545). This model of constructive dialogue would also help to allay the concerns of those who question the practical possibility of implementing CMS in a traditional higher education setting (for example, Reynolds, 1999; Choo, 2007).

### **Critical management studies and human resources management**

The three concepts of anti-performativity, denaturalisation, and reflexivity are key to creating a more critical discipline of human resources management. For example, reflexivity on the part of the HRM academic is integral to constructing a HRM programme that is not presented as a ‘value-free’ science (Moosmayer, 2011). The overly positivist approach taken by HRM at UKZN is evidenced in the nature of articles published by academics in the discipline. Furthermore, the bulk of the theses produced at Master’s and doctoral level reflects national trends in the discipline towards positivist value-free approaches to measuring HRM concepts such as job satisfaction, work engagement, and motivation. The positivist approach places the academic as a value-free agent in the classroom. Moosmayer (2010:9) referred to this as a “paradox of value-free science and the need for value-orientated management studies.” The aim and function of management as a science is being increasingly called into question (Starkey and Madan, 2000, *British Journal of Management*, Vol. 12, Special Issue, 2001, Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010). Contributors to the special issue, for example, suggested that management studies need to shift from an instrumentalist economic perspective that treats employers as resources to a Mode 3 form of management research “that is targeted toward society and the greater good” (Huff and Huff, 2001:51). Much of the critique from academia was that positivism constructed the management sciences (of which HRM is a sub-discipline) as an “economic science [that] is value free” (Moosmayer, 2010:51). This scientific approach is guided by the principle of profit maximisation. As Moosmayer contended, this value-free approach has certainly been the dominant approach or paradigm informing management studies since its conception as a discipline. One only needs to think of Taylorism and scientific management to understand that the guiding paradigm of the management sciences has been one of utilitarianism and profit maximisation. In this sense, the management sciences are not

value free, but have an implicit and explicit set of values that are based on a purely economic rationale and construct of the human being as a human resource who needs to be managed to achieve a profit-maximisation function. This was certainly the goal of Taylor, who is widely lauded in management studies literature as the 'father of scientific management.' How then can the management studies academic disrupt this notion of a value-free or economic rationalist approach to HRM? One approach, as suggested by Moosmayer (2010) and Lukea-Bhiwajee (2010), is to encourage greater introspection about the nature and purpose of the discipline amongst academics. This may encourage a shift towards a more social and critical perspective in the ways in which the discipline is taught and the research is generated. As human beings, it is impossible for us to be objective or value free, despite the contentions of positivism (Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010). An honest and thorough conversation is needed by management studies academics about the purpose and values that they wish to impart to students of management and HRM. The present authors endorse the argument by Lukea-Bhiwajee (2010:235) that "the time has come for business schools to practice giving voices to their values through management education." Academics need to be value agents, and being scientific does not imply being value free.

### **Emancipatory education**

It is also vital that a critical approach to the teaching of management is complemented by an appropriate curriculum and teaching, learning, and assessment approaches. The work of Freire (1970, 1993) set the direction for the character of the learning that is more likely to foster the development of learners who will question the order of society and be equipped to bring about change. The planning and implementation of learning should aspire to be 'problem posing,' and be built on dialogue, focus on relationships, context, and process. An emancipatory education approach aims to construct a teaching and learning experience that encourages the questioning of society and its norms and values. The curriculum and the teaching, learning, and assessment need

to be built around Freire's principle of problem posing within a learning environment in which teachers and learners are partners in the learning process (1970:19). For Freire, the process of conscientisation cannot happen within the standard 'banking' model of education, which tends to involve the handing over of a product from teacher to students. These courses tend to be arranged in a linear model, often around a series of topics or even text book chapters. These traditional processes send strong messages about the nature of knowledge as incontestable, and do not encourage the unsettling of assumptions or the questioning of values. Instead, these pedagogical approaches continue to endorse the model of "obedience to authority and accepting of dominator-based hierarchy" (Hooks, 2003:19-20). It is the principles of Freire that, for the present authors, provide the touchstone for reviewing and redesigning HRM curricula that can prepare students for critical participation in the South African workplace as HRM practitioners.

### **Building a critical HRM programme**

In reviewing and redesigning HRM programmes to develop students' capacity to critique and question, a number of key components need to be considered. These are outlined in the next section of the discussion.

### **Curriculum content and programme structure**

The curriculum needs to be built on a particular understanding of the purposes of university education and of the intellectual project of HRM. The vision that informs this paper is that the purpose of academia is more than the instrumental production of workers. The production of skills for employment must be complemented by the education of critical graduates whose purpose it is to question this instrumentality. Thus, we advocate HRM that draws on the characteristics of anti-performativity. Students need to learn the principles of HRM (such as selection, recruitment, performance management, HR information systems, diversity), and simultaneously critique the ways in which these practices occur or are

conveyed. In order to nurture this capacity for critical participation in the workplace, HRM curricula and courses need to include a number of key elements.

There needs to be an inclusion and embedding of political economy and moral economy in HRM curricula, to foster recognition of and disrupt prevailing ideologies of HRM.

A critical curriculum for HRM in an emerging economy context needs to include education in political economy as a key learning outcome. Political economy provides both a historical and a social context for students trying to understand where, why, and how the management of people in organisational contexts occurs. An argument could be made that these aspects of the syllabus or curriculum are best left to industrial sociologists, and students can register for modules on the sociology of work. However, the reality at a multiple-site campus such as UKZN is that commerce faculties and curricula work in isolation from humanities and social science faculties. Management Sciences (including HRM) works very much in pedagogic and research isolation from colleagues in other faculties. This is exacerbated by the layout of the university, which means that the Commerce faculty and the Business School are located 15 kilometres away from the Social Science school of UKZN. Some consequences of this are that students cannot choose electives that may provide political economy context for their studies in HRM. Furthermore, even on single-campus universities, business and commerce schools work very much in isolation from their colleagues in sociology of work. More importantly, HRM as a discipline does not sufficiently allow for a critique of itself and its pedagogic practices. In contrast, business schools in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Scandinavia actively employed and recruit sociologists, psychologists, and a range of other social scientists to teach their HRM programmes (Thompson, 2010). This was, in part, due to the closing down of social science faculties at many universities in the United Kingdom, but it was also due to an emerging recognition that existing models of management, education, and

commerce education in general are straining in terms of their relevance in the current context of global financial crises. There is a general sense amongst the public and intellectuals that business schools have largely failed in their social responsibility projects.

HRM curricula need to be rooted in the context of moral economy. As Smyth and Pryke (2006) argued, management studies have tended to ignore the role of ethics and values in relationships in both research and practice. Sayer (2003:14) further contended that most “management and economic theory and practice either see profit and growth motives as their primary interests, thus subsuming and absorbing morality within these interests or perceive it as a purely personal matter. Smyth and Pryke (2006:9) took issue with prevailing discourses in HRM that demarcate the moral as personal, and therefore not the domain of work, organisations, and HRM. They contend that “morality is central to economic functioning.” Morality is foundational, and underpins the market economy. Students need to be presented with multiple perspectives of the ways in which economies function, so as to promote a problem-solving approach in the classroom. Inevitably, students will experience the contradictions between in the imperatives of the moral economy and those of the market economy.

Correspondingly, the curriculum and course content should promote critical questioning of the morality and ethics of business practices. South African business school lecture halls are the perfect laboratory in which to experiment with teaching HRM within the context of moral economy. HRM, sociology, and industrial psychology were social sciences that, in many ways, reinforced Apartheid South Africa’s policies of racialised capitalism. This was done based on amoral pseudo-scientific positivist eugenic ideas that rationalised racialised capitalism; a post-Apartheid project requires educationalists to teach within the context of moral economy. This does not mean courses in business ethics, but rather having moral economy inform each HRM module being taught. Grey (2004) and Lukea-Bhiwajee (2010) demonstrated in their work that



an integrated ethical component is mostly absent from HRM- and management studies modules that they have surveyed.

### **Learning outcomes**

Course learning outcomes need to include higher order verbs such as *critique* and *evaluate*, but the expectation that students will acquire the ability to engage critically must be matched with appropriate teaching and learning approaches. Specifically, teachers need to model and demonstrate critical inquiry, and students need coaching in and regular practice opportunities to develop skills like detecting assumptions and values, recognising multiple perspectives, and scrutinising language. The capacity to be critical is difficult for students, and academics have a responsibility to teach students how to do this; otherwise, the desire that HRM students will question the ethics of their practices will remain empty rhetoric.

### **Incorporating interdisciplinary perspectives**

HRM is a social science, and there is a need to incorporate social science perspectives in the teaching of HRM. This is an important recognition because, at UKZN, as at all South African universities, HRM is housed within a commerce faculty, and not within the social sciences faculty. The spatial dynamics of a multi-site campus like UKZN means that all commerce-related disciplines (for example HRM, marketing, supply chain management, economics, and accounting) are housed on the Westville Campus, and all social science disciplines (for example, sociology, psychology, and labour studies) are housed 15kms away, at the Howard College campus. The implication of this, from a practical and curriculum perspective, is that students registered for a BCom (HRM) degree are unlikely to major in a social science subject like psychology or labour studies that may provide them with alternate perspectives on workplaces. Students who wish to combine an HRM and a labour studies major would need to travel between campuses on a daily basis, at their own

expense. Timetabling difficulties compound the challenge of attending classes at two campuses. Social science electives for BCom students, whilst theoretically possible, are rarely registered for, given the logistical issues of a multiple-site campus. A pedagogical implication is that, for most BCom (HRM) students, their curricula are exclusively commerce-based, with no interventions from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, or labour studies. The workplace for HRM students is therefore constructed solely as an organisation, and workers as organisational citizens, rather than workers as social citizens first, and organisational citizens second. If students are not able to access social science modules like labour studies due to logistical reasons, then the onus is on HRM academics to provide a more critical and socially orientated and contextualised HRM curriculum that draws on a social science paradigm. This curriculum should be aimed at producing more than an organisational citizen or 'good employee,' but also be aimed at producing a social and critical citizen and 'bad employee' who questions the social, economic, and organisational status quo.

### **Context-specific and context-sensitive study materials**

If students are to become critical HRM practitioners in South Africa, they will need to be alert to the socially constructed values and assumptions that underpin behaviours and thinking in organisations, and which frequently bolster inequitable power relationships. Text books and resource materials that are developed in other contexts reinforce a perception of employment relations concerns as context-neutral, and determined and resolved by the implementation and application of universally valid rules and procedures. If Freire's goal of conscientisation is to be attainable, South African problems, cases, and organisations need to be the material that students are invited to examine critically. Students need to be assessing the strengths and limitations of standard HRM tools within the complexities of South African realities, as well as recognising the power imbalances that these tools may support.

### Research paradigm

There needs to be a move away from theoretical, orthodox positivist research methodologies to mixed methodologies and qualitative methodologies of research in the discipline. As argued earlier in the paper, science is not value free, and positivism and associated quantitative approaches to research in HRM must not be represented as value-free approaches. Positivism itself is a cultural development in the sciences and, as such, cannot be value free, and quantitative measurement may not always be able to capture all aspects of what is being measured. In particular, values, experiences, and emotions are constructed in language, and language needs to be deconstructed in order to identify and evaluate prevailing power relations. The present authors do not dispute that quantitative approaches have enormous value for the discipline, but the philosophy of research that underpins it needs to be made more explicit, and it is argued that methodological pluralism in the classroom and in HRM research approaches is more appropriate. Such pluralism is more likely to give learners the ability to access multiple perspectives, in particular, the voice of workers in HRM research and classroom learning.

### Pedagogical models to promote criticality

The inquiry-based model of learning provides a potential pedagogical framework for repositioning the students' role in the learning process and for moving from 'banking' to 'problem-posing' (Freire, 1970; 1993). The inquiry-based model of teaching and learning is designed to help students to develop research-minded dispositions such as critical evaluation and questioning (Healey, 2005; Land and Gordon, 2008). The curriculum is designed around problems, questions, or points of inquiry, and teachers and learners collaborate to use course materials to investigate the problems. In this model, the students are positioned as co-inquirers, rather than passive recipients of information. In terms of citizenship and social participation, this approach helps students to develop a sense of themselves as engaged and questioning agents in the workforce

and the community. Alongside this co-inquiry model, the positioning of students and teachers as partners in a dialogical process is important (Baxter Magolda, 2004; Freire, 1970; 1973). The framework of inquiry-based learning sits well with the educational philosophy of learning partnerships developed by Baxter Magolda (2004; 2009), which is underpinned by her 20-year longitudinal study of (American) students' epistemological beliefs. One common pattern was her finding that college students relied extensively on external authorities in their learning process. There was a corresponding recognition of how poorly equipped this left students to deal with the complexities of contemporary society or, as Barnett sees it, "supercomplexity." Barnett describes supercomplexity as follows:

*Supercomplexity denotes a fragile world but it is a fragility brought on not merely by social technological change; it is a fragility in the way in which we understand ourselves and in the ways in which we feel secure about acting in the world (2006:6).*

Baxter Magolda's extensive research demonstrated a chasm between the way many students saw knowledge as absolute and located in an external authority, and the unprecedented level of uncertainty in contemporary society. (It is possible to suggest that, in the period of immense social transformation that characterises contemporary South Africa, the need for intellectual flexibility and moral vigilance is even greater). In response to the finding of student dependence on authority, Magolda developed the concept of learning partnerships. Her model was informed by the interviewees' stories of the factors that helped them to develop autonomy in various spheres of life after college. In Baxter Magolda's Learning Partnerships Model, a transition to autonomy is enabled by "merging three supportive components with three challenges in the learning environment" (2009:150). In this model, the support components are described as "validating learners' ability to know, situating learning in learners' experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning" (Baxter Magolda, 2009:150). The challenge components

that can encourage learner autonomy are the recognition that “knowledge is complex and socially constructed, self is central to knowledge construction, and authority and expertise are shared among knowledgeable peers” (Baxter Magolda, 2009:150). In the context of the present study, these components align well with the need to educate students to become active agents in their society, and whose education informs their engagement with economic, political, and social environments. Furthermore, these students will be better equipped to face their working contexts, armed with vigilance and critical questioning. They will be well-versed in the recognition that the nature of reality is slippery and continually being formed and reformed, depending on the agendas of those involved.

### Examples of teaching, learning, and assessment practices to promote critical questioning

While many management educators may endorse some of the aspirations for their students that are advocated in this study, they can remain locked into teaching, learning, and assessment behaviours that are counterproductive. In order for students to develop a voice in the learning process, they need to be engaged in ways that challenge and disturb their thinking from the beginning of their studies, and be given authentic opportunities to contribute to design, content, and assessment of their learning. Bearing in mind the key principle of the Learning Partnerships Model, these shifts in the structure of the learning experience need to be introduced with plenty of support and coaching, so that students can grow in confidence and capacity, and move gradually to learner autonomy and trust in the legitimacy and value of their own voice. Furthermore, this process needs to be embedded throughout a degree or programme, or the reliance on an external authority cannot be altered fundamentally and for the long term. Two broad shifts in the way teaching and learning are conducted can assist in this process. These shifts involve a reconceptualisation of the role of the lecturer in the learning process, and approaching the learning materials through cases, problems,

or points of inquiry; these two elements will be outlined in the following section.

### The role of the lecturer

In order for students to develop a voice in the learning process, changes to the teaching and learning process cannot be piecemeal, but need to be built on a reconceptualisation of the lecturer’s role and a reconfiguration of learning spaces and the relationship between them.

Typically, university academics work within a fairly linear model, in which lectures, small group teaching, readings, assessment, and on-line activities (when used) may be quite bounded and distinctive learning spaces. It is argued that it is more helpful to see these activities as inter-linked learning sites, all of which can be brought directly or indirectly into the learning space.

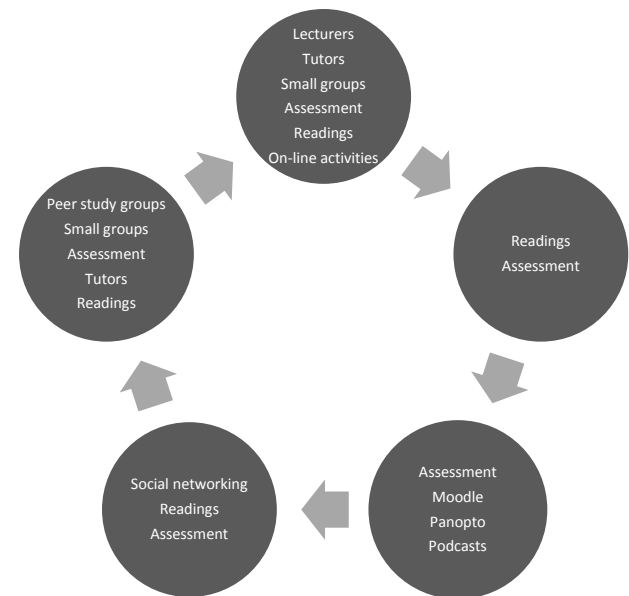


Figure 1: Interlinked sites of learning

Within this paradigm, the lecturer’s role also needs rethinking. McWilliam (2008:263-265) offered an evocative conception of the lecturer as “meddler-in-the-middle,” a positioning that sees teacher and students as “mutually involved in assembling and dis-assembling cultural products.” The teacher is conceptualised as “being a usefully ignorant co-worker in the thick of the action.” The idea of teacher as ‘meddler in the middle’ fits comfortably with the pedagogy of inquiry-based learning, in which students are co-inquirers in

the learning process (Healey, 2005; Land, 2008).

What could this look like in practice? In HRM, a key case that requires the students to identify and apply core HRM practices and raises issues of power inequities and ethical debates could be the point of inquiry around which the teaching and learning are built. Instead of framing the large class as a sequence of topics related to HRM competencies, the course is built around a key case that requires the application of a number of core competencies, but also invites students to investigate issue of social control, power, and morality. As suggested in the diagram, the learning could occur in a number of inter-linked sites. For example, students could be allocated to groups, and assessment could require groups to make electronic submissions around a case that requires them to identify the required competencies, and explain how they would apply these.

Teaching and assessment need to open up new lines of inquiry, as opposed to focussing on procedures and the application of rules. As research has demonstrated that assessment is the primary determinant of the quality of student learning, it is important that the assessment promotes sustainable and relevant learning. A critical management education must consider, not only the formats of assessment, but also the power inequities in the assessment and evaluation processes. Partnership cannot be restricted to teaching and learning spaces, but student participation needs to be extended to dialogue around assessment, including criteria and incorporating self- and peer assessment. As Reynolds and Trehan (2000) argued, academics cannot hold all the power in assessment in the context of learning that asks students to challenge and question social hierarchies and the unequal distribution of power.

### **An experiment in building teaching and learning around a case study**

As has been argued, developing students' critical capacities requires an entire curriculum- and pedagogical overhaul. The following example is presented simply to give a more specific

impression of what inquiry-based learning can look like in practice. However, it must be emphasised that the value and long-term impact of teaching and learning in this way are severely limited if it is an isolated activity that is not matched by the structure and teaching and learning approaches in the rest of the course and the HRM programme as a whole.

The case study of Marikana illustrates how a particular event, problem, or scenario can be a focal point for both learning course content and examining the discourses that converge around the content. In the context of a 14-week labour legislation module offered by UKZN in 2012, it was useful to juxtapose the public and private personalities of organisations such as Lonmin (the ground zero of the Marikana massacre). Students were provided with information from Lonmin's official webpage, annual report, and corporate social responsibility report. Students then had to read the Benchmarks Foundation's report on the ways in which mining companies like Lonmin failed to live up to their corporate social responsibilities to miners. Given that the news of the industrial dispute was unfolding in the South African media on a daily basis, students were encouraged to bring newspapers, trade magazines, as well as video clips of how the media represented the views of Lonmin and of the miners. Students had to become active agents in reading and challenging the discourses of business, organised labour, and the state of the Lonmin issue. They were forced to engage with the complexity of a situation that, in essence, was the collapse of an industrial relations system. Students were guided to act like detectives in wading through the various sources. It was important that they had access to various sources, since the trade unions and workers who were killed were being vilified by the popular press (Alexander, 2013).

Students needed to recognise that being an HR practitioner is not only about being an organisational citizen, but also about reading complex social situations, and understanding political economy, moral economy, and being critical social citizens. The assessment was

designed to correspond to the learning approach. In their class essay and examinations students, were asked to provide an interpretation of what, according to their understanding, accounted for the situation at Lonmin. Whilst some provided very managerial accounts (lazy and ungrateful workers, ill-disciplined trade unions), the bulk of students responses demonstrated that they engaged deeply with a complex situation, and gave some surprisingly insightful answers. They were able to identify the following as components of the events of the massacre:

- Massive economic inequalities in South African society;
- A low-wage culture in the mining industry;
- Mining capital's dominance of the South African economy and capital outflows of profits generated from industry to investors abroad;
- The politics of race and racism in the mining sector;
- An appalling occupational health and safety record of Lonmin and the mining industry in general in South Africa;
- Failure of Lonmin to live up to its public promises and corporate social responsibilities; and
- A recalcitrant government, reluctant to interfere with mining capital's privilege.

That the students were able to identify the themes above in a labour legislation HRM module was encouraging. However, such insights are only possible with a specific type of pedagogy. It is a pedagogy that encourages complexity, dissonance, and an attention to local context. It can occur through choosing locally relevant case studies that are morally and socially complex, and to which there are no 'model' answers. Ultimately, however, the full impact of working in this way can only be experienced when the approaches are embedded in an entire programme.

## CONCLUSION

The authors intend to use this paper as a starting point for a critical evaluation of the current content of the HRM programme at UKZN, its underpinning research paradigm, and the related teaching, learning, and assessment practices. It is hoped that this will aid the construction of a programme that does not simply prepare HRM practitioners, but which enables them to negotiate the complex tension between critique and performance in HRM practice, and not simply become agents of those with economic power. It is hoped that the anticipated research journey will help to transform the way in which HRM students are educated, and assist them to not simply reproduce or regulate relations in the work place, but to evaluate them, and contribute to justice and social equity.

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