MOVING FROM A TRANSMISSION TO A SOCIAL REFORM TEACHING PERSPECTIVE: USING TEACHERS’ ACTION RESEARCH AS CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
This article gives an account of an action research project that I used to examine and improve my own teaching practices. In this project, I used insights from critical pedagogy to inform my transition from a transmission to a social reform teaching perspective. When I used the critical pedagogical concept of constructed consciousness and the problem-posing teaching strategy to interact with my students as co-inquirers and to disrupt their prior knowledge, I noticed that many themes emerged, most notably that (a) students do not often question their assumptions, (b) students feel helpless to change the future, and (c) there is dissonance between students’ beliefs and their practices. The final section of the article explains what I learned about teaching and learning as I engaged in action research pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION
The adult education literature suggests that students come to the classroom with a wealth of prior knowledge. Learning, then, is an interaction between students’ use of prior knowledge and the classroom experience (Galbraith, 2003; Vella, 1994). Put another way, it is the accumulation of information, ideas, and schemata that are generated by all the experiences students have both inside and outside the classroom. This enables students to accommodate new concepts by generating links to their existing knowledge. However, if the prior knowledge is not sufficiently developed to meet the challenges of the classroom, this can hinder learning. For instance, as explained by Ambrose et al. (2010), if in the past students inaccurately learned certain beliefs, models, or theories, this can hinder them from acquiring new knowledge because they will be predisposed “to ignore, discount, or
resist evidence that conflicts with what they believe to be true” (p. 24). Hence I will be able to increase the effectiveness of my teaching if I take into account what my incoming students know or think they know. To do this I must also reflect on and interrogate my own teaching practice.

This article, therefore, has a twofold purpose. First, it recounts an action research project consisting of a self-reflexive narrative of my own teaching practice as I move away from a transmission approach to teaching. According to the transmission model, effective teaching begins with a significant commitment to the mastery of the subject and to a critical pedagogy whose goal is to help students awaken to the values and ideologies that are embedded in texts and common practices (Pratt, 2005). I have chosen to interrogate the transmission approach because it does not align with my own intentions in teaching. Second, this article addresses a concern that I have about my own teaching. I want to disrupt students’ developing understanding of the subject matter by engaging them in the teaching and learning process. However, the more I engage with my students, the more I become aware of the "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1989; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006) between my beliefs about teaching and my teaching practices. That is, by focusing on the content of the discipline I do not adequately challenge some of my students’ prior knowledge, and that living contradiction renders me incapable of moving my students forward in their learning.

Whitehead and McNiff (2006) offer four guiding questions for constructing a theory: (1) What is my concern? (2) Why am I concerned? (3) What can I do about it? (4) How do I evaluate the educational influence of my actions? I will use these questions as the framework for this article.

**THE CONTEXT: WHAT IS MY CONCERN?**

I am a faculty member of a graduate theological school that is embedded in a university. Many of the graduate students that I teach come from a religiously conservative tradition that focuses on the high authority of the Bible and the personal decision to follow Christ. Theologian David Fitch (2011) states that “the commitments to the authority of Scripture, a conversionist salvation, and an activist evangelistic stance of the church in the world, which these beliefs attests to, are essential to a vibrant Christian faith in North America” (p. 17). I sense that some of my students use defending absolute truth as merely a way to be right. This echoes another of Fitch’s statements, “It is not about the Truth, it is about being in control of the Truth! It is about possessing the Truth as an object instead of it possessing us” (p. 65).

Not all of my graduate students are like that, but some are. I am well aware that some students are not extremely active in their own learning and are not aware of the perspective of other people, including the professor. I therefore must ask myself how teaching and learning can happen in the classroom that help students consider other people’s perspectives. If the perspective of other students and the professor are not considered, and if beliefs are not analyzed, interrogated, and taken up in the classroom, then I am afraid that some of these students that Fitch has described above will continue to
use this privilege attitude of being right as a way of paralyzing their own learning in the classroom.

Moreover, students seem to consider me an expert, which I think deters them from participating in critical dialogue. This is what Freire (1992) calls the banking model of education, where the professor puts in credits in the form of knowledge and students store up these knowledge credits in their minds so that they can recover them during evaluations. In my own teaching practices, I transmit a specific body of knowledge or skills to passive students who patiently receive, memorize, and repeat that knowledge. The emphasis is on memorization of basic facts rather than on understanding and critical thinking. The damaging consequences of the banking model in education are well documented (Apple, 2006; Giroux, 2003; Moustakim, 2007).

This makes me feel conflicted, because I value education’s ability to raise awareness and to contribute to what Whitehead (2004) calls education of formations, which is based upon living values that bring forth hope for the future of humanity in the regulations and practices that guide social organizations. In the context of theological and higher education, a commitment to the education of formations, as Moustakim (2007) explains it, “would lead to an inquiry into the forms of pedagogy that do not focus on the most effective modes of transmission of propositional knowledge, but . . . that engage students in critical engagement with the knowledge being imparted, by submitting it to interrogation” (p. 212).

WHY AM I CONCERNED?

As I have already mentioned, I believe that the way I teach has contributed to this lack of critical engagement. In my teaching, the main learning setting is a passive lecture-discussion format in which I speak and my students listen. The transmission perspective of teaching starts with the premise that the student will be taught a certain piece of knowledge or skill, so prior knowledge is considered unimportant and is therefore ignored. Learning outside the defined course objectives is considered irrelevant. Since I am the one who sets the objectives, motivation for learning is external. Students are evaluated based on their ability to copy a model. I do all the thinking. The students are commanded to work rather than invited to make meaning from a learning experience. Instruction is controlled and confined.

I assume that my current teaching practices do very little to challenge my students’ prior learning and to equip them to change the world into a better place. I think that my students need to vigorously contribute to their learning so that they can make informed decisions about pastoral practice as they contribute to the ministry of the parishes that they serve and make for a better society for all.

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

One of the ways to move from a transmission perspective to more of a dialogical perspective that promotes critical engagement is to examine more deeply one’s own teaching perspective. My teaching perspective is, to use Pratt’s words (2005), “the
interrelated set of beliefs and intentions that gives direction and justification to my teaching actions” (p. 45). My perspective is a lens through which I see teaching and learning. Pratt identifies five teaching perspectives: transmission, development, apprenticeship, nurturing, and social reform. The transmission perspective is the most-used teaching perspective in higher education (Galbraith, 2008). From the transmission perspective, good teaching begins with considerable dedication to the body of knowledge of a particular discipline (Pratt, 2005). This means that it is vital for the transmission-oriented professor to have an excellent grasp of the content. Professors who lecture from this standpoint have certain suppositions of the student, and the student is seen as a container to be filled with knowledge. Professors are expected to competently teach and effectively put forward a common body of knowledge so that students can emulate the thinking of the text or the professor.

The problem with this perspective is that it can make it difficult for professors to communicate with students who do not comprehend the reasoning inherent in their content. Furthermore, students usually have trouble coming up with real-life examples of difficulties that can make the content come alive. When students ask me questions, I frequently return to the body of knowledge as a means of dealing with those challenges. I also find myself spending too much time talking. In fact, I often use students’ questions as an opportunity to talk even more rather than as a way to engage students. In spite of these problems, of course there are situations in which this teaching perspective can be used to deliver content effectively.

Moving towards a social reform teaching perspective led me to read the critical pedagogy literature (Giroux, 1993; Hooks, 1989, 1994; Kincheloe, 2004; McLaren, 1989, 2003) and the adult education literature (Cross, 1981; Brookfield, 1995; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 1991; Taylor, Marienau, & Fiddler, 2000) in order to help me align my teaching practices with my values about education. From the critical pedagogy literature one can discern that teaching is not just an individual concern but also a societal concern. Pratt, Collins, and Jarvis-Selinger (2001) explain critical pedagogy thus:

Good teachers awaken students to the values and ideologies that are embedded in texts and common practices within their discipline. Good teachers challenge the status quo and encourage students to consider how learners are positioned and constructed in particular discourses and practices. To do so, common practices are analyzed and deconstructed for the ways in which they reproduce and maintain conditions deemed unacceptable. Class discussion is focused less on how knowledge has been created, and more by whom and for what purposes. Students are encouraged to take a critical stance to give them power to take social action to improve their own lives; critical deconstruction, though central to this view, is not an end in itself. (p. 3).

As a result of reading the literature, I realized that I needed to understand critical pedagogy more deeply by implementing it in my classroom. I used an action research cycle to help me
to implement it and analyze how it worked in my classroom. The next section explains my process.

**Using Constructed Consciousness in the Classroom**

Critical pedagogy uses constructed consciousness for the purpose of analysis. Hinchey (1998) defines constructed consciousness as “the mental habit of asking ourselves what assumptions are guiding our actions; why we believe what we believe; who gains and who loses from the assumptions we endorse; whether things might be otherwise, and possibly better; and how we might effect change if we think it desirable” (p. 123). From a more technical perspective, constructed consciousness denotes a method that cultivates the ability to investigate, ask questions, scrutinize, and take action on the social, religious, cultural, economic, and political settings that affect and influence life (Dirkx, 1998). Through the use of dialogue, critical pedagogy develops attentiveness to the structures within a culture that might be causing oppression and inequality. Dirkx (1998) points out that, for students,

> Learning helps develop a deeper understanding of the ways in which these social structures shape and influence the ways they think about themselves and the world. This process consists of action and reflection in transactional or dialectical relationship with each other (praxis). It provides [students] with a voice, with the ability to name the world and, in so doing, construct for [themselves] the meaning of the world. (p. 3)

Freire (2008) suggests a three-step process for teaching and learning: name, reflect critically, and act. I connected this process to the cycle used in the spiral model of action research: look, think, and act (Stringer, 2007). Those processes together gave me a way to structure critical pedagogy.

One way that I used the action research cycle was to employ a teaching strategy called problem-posing. Wink (1997) sets out the principles of problem-posing as it pertains to the professor-student relationship: trust each other; believe that involvement matters; understand resistance and institutional barriers to change; and be aware of your own power and knowledge. Wink believes that problem-posing is much more than a method or even a series of methods—more accurately:

> Problem-posing brings interactive participation and critical inquiry into the existing curriculum, and expands it to reflect the curriculum of the students’ lives. The learning is not just grounded in the prepared syllabus, the established [and] prescribed curriculum. Problem-posing opens the door to ask questions and seek answers, not only of the visible curriculum, but also of the hidden curriculum, [which] is why it can feel uncomfortable—problem-posing causes [students] to ask questions they may not want to hear. (pp. 51-52)

My goal in problem-posing is to create a safe environment in which hard questions can be asked and reflected on and thereby to assist students with codification. Codification means
putting the problem in some format. It is a tactic of collecting data material in order to construct a picture around real people and actual circumstances. Wink (1997, pp. 108-109) proposes a codification model based on Freire’s work that can be broken down into four phases: (1) begin with students’ own experiences by giving them opportunities to reflect; (2) identify, investigate, and pose a problem within students’ own lives; (3) solve the problem together; and (4) act.

What follows is an example of problem-posing in a course I teach called Teaching and Learning. The description of what I did in class is followed by a brief reflection on the pedagogical moves I made using the cycle of the spiral model of action research (look, think, and act). Since problem-posing is new to me, I decided to use two classes in this course as a pilot project to implement the problem-posing strategy. I began the course using a transmission perspective of teaching, so making a shift in teaching perspective required student support. It is significant that making a shift in teaching perspective in the middle of a course reinforced the reason for doing so (that is, that students need to be contributors to their learning so that they can make informed decisions about their pastoral practice). However, I had to keep in mind that students would likely be unaware of the challenges to the banking model of education. I anticipated students’ resistance both to the interrogation of commonly held views around gender, teaching, and leadership and to not using the transmission perspective via lecturing. I found Breunig’s insights (2006) helpful, specifically the assertion that “it would be difficult to find fault in a student at the university level who resisted the liberatory classroom. Students have spent nearly 13,000 hours engaged in the pervasive repetition of material, under the regimentation of a highly structured classroom experience that is lifeless” (The Conversation, para. 74).

My Teaching and Learning class has fifteen students—eight men and seven women—whose ages range from 25 to 50. The topic for the two classes in which I conducted the pilot project was the role of men and women in the teaching ministry of the church. In the class that preceded the pilot project, I began by asking the students Wamba’s three questions (2011), slightly modified: (1) What do you want from the next two classes? (2) What will you contribute in the next two classes? (3) How will we execute what you decide?

I then explained to them that I wanted to use a different teaching approach called problem-posing and that they would be participants in the development of the next two classes. Students in my class reacted with what Wamba (2011) aptly describes as “a silence in the room punctuated by invisible question marks, anxiety, frustration and annoyance” (p. 166). I explained the principles of problem-posing and fielded the questions and concerns that the students had. Students mainly asked clarification questions about problem-posing. Although the initial responses did not look favourable, all the students agreed to move forward.

As I reflected on the beginning of this class, it encouraged students to think about the transmission teaching perspective to which they were accustomed. My role as professor began to shift to a second-person role (Reason & Bradbury, 2006), one that facilitates
discussion and helps the co-participants to define their problems and find answers (Stringer, 2007). What follows is a description of the implementation of the problem-posing strategy. I have amalgamated phases one and two.

**Phase One:** Begin with students’ own experiences by giving them opportunities to reflect.

**Phase Two:** Identify, investigate and pose a problem within the students’ own lives.

I asked the class to reflect and to share their experiences of teaching and learning in their parish contexts. As we reflected together, many of the women shared about their negative experiences of not being able to preach and asked questions about why women could not be senior pastors. We inevitably talked about the roles of men and women in the church. In this class there are some students—mostly men but also some women—who take a more traditional or complementarian stance on the roles of men and women. That is, they believe that God created women and men to be equal in personhood and in value, but different in role. They also believe that Scripture supports male leadership in the home and that likewise in the Church particular teaching and leadership roles are reserved for men. These students shared their experiences that related to this topic.

**Phase Three:** Solve the problem together.

I then suggested a few articles that take an egalitarian view of the roles of women and men, articles that argue that there is no scriptural reason for women not to share in the leadership of the church where there is mutual submission. I also suggested a few articles that support the traditional view. As the resource person, I merely suggested these articles as a way to get students into the literature. Students could find their own articles to read.

**Phase Four:** Act.

I put the class into reading groups of three or four students to read and discuss the articles together before the next class. Each reading group had students with traditional views as well as students with egalitarian views. In the next class, each group presented how they resolved or moved forward on this issue and gave suggestions for further action.

As I reflected on the pedagogical moves that I made going through the four phases of problem-posing, I realized that I needed to give my students time to think about their lived experiences and to give them an opportunity to voice their concerns. The silence and interaction in class provided the opportunity for students to consider the other in the classroom. This enabled students, especially those who held a complementarian view, to examine their prior learning through the lived and hurtful experiences of others. In other words, students began to codify the thoughts or comprehend the picture that these women were attempting to paint that disrupted many students’ prior understanding and learning. From a pedagogical standpoint, I began to move away from a transmission perspective that values control in the classroom to a dialogical, student-centred approach that actually generates further knowledge about the issue at hand. Furthermore, I transitioned from the role of expert to the role of facilitator. In that role, I initiated a process to help students find a language with which to conceptualize and articulate their thoughts. I managed this by asking leading questions that connected to students’ lives. This environment gave students
the space to work together to solve this issue, which in turn gave them the sense of being empowered by their own learning and actions. Wamba (2011) states that “students as co-inquirers with their teachers have the capacity to construct knowledge if given both the learning resources and encouragement to do so” (p. 164). In the next section, I will use this concept of co-inquiry and shed light on what the students had to say about learning. I will also lay out the themes that emerged in our conversations.

**How do I evaluate the educational influence of my actions?**

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of my problem-posing teaching strategy, I facilitated a focus group interview. I invited students to come voluntarily and debrief, converse about the learning that happened in the previous two classes, and evaluate the educational influence of my actions. I was inviting students to be my co-participants or co-inquirers so that they could have a voice about instruction in the classroom. Eleven students came to the focus group interview: six women and five men. The interview took place on campus in the middle of the semester and lasted approximately two and a half hours. It was video-recorded and then transcribed with the written consent of the students. The consent form also indicated that the institution’s Research Ethics Board had approved the project.

The interview guide contained roughly thirteen questions. The questions were mostly about students’ perceptions and opinions of the effects of the problem-posing teaching strategy that I had employed in the classroom. In conjunction with the questions, I used probes to encourage the students to share further details, introspections, and experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

I used the qualitative data analysis software program ATLAS.ti to help me immerse myself in the raw data and to aid me with coding. In the first phase of immersion, I watched the video-recording of the focus group and then took notes. I then transcribed the interview conversations verbatim and subsequently read and re-read the transcript. I was endeavoring at this stage to get a sense of the interview in its particularity and the ways in which it might advance the study as a whole. This task required me to reflect on the interview in its entirety before breaking it down into smaller units.

Once I had acquired a good feel for the interview, I began the coding phase. During this repetitive procedure I evaluated data in the form of words, phrases, sentences, or segments, and then categorized this data into units of meaning. I began coding the focus group by re-reading the transcript and then re-watching the video-recording. As a result, I modified some of the codes in order to refine them, which then helped me to generate a number of categories. Here are some sample categories from the focus group data: student expectations of the two classes; engagement with the text; not questioning assumptions; learning outcome and assessment of the two classes; student powerlessness; disconnect between belief and practice; and building better community.

I then eliminated categories that contained only one or two examples or that overlapped considerably with other categories. However, Norton (2009) warns that “even if one person has said something that can be described as a category, it might be more true to the
research analysis to keep it in; this is part of the subjective process and will need justifying” (p. 120). If I was to heed this warning, I needed to find another way to refine these categories/concepts. For this purpose, I relied on the strategies that Bazeley (2013, p. 230) suggests: (1) Note where this concept sits within your coding system and/or current analysis framework. This will help to put it into context and to see what its role might be in your analysis. (2) Read through text coded for the concept you are considering. Make a summary by listing the points you observe as you read. (3) Define the boundaries of the code and the concept it represents—what it includes, what it doesn’t include. (4) Consider how widely this concept was raised in the data, for how many cases it was relevant, and who or which these cases were. Identify also where it was absent, or was discussed in negative terms. Do those who discussed it differ from those who didn’t in any obvious way?

I found the ATLAS.ti program particularly useful for categorizing. It not only assisted me by handling the categories/concepts involved but also allowed me to visually connect these categories/concepts in the form of networks and then to develop and link themes. Bazeley (2013) defines a theme as a way to “describe an integrating, relational statement derived from the data that identifies both content and meaning” (p. 190). Although numerous themes arose from the focus group, in the next section I will interpret only the most significant of these themes.

**Students Do Not Often Question Their Assumptions**

One of the main themes that surfaced from the focus group is that students do not often question their assumptions when they are in a learning environment. For example, students in ministry programs have absorbed certain information from the educational and religious cultures around them, and this information has shaped their ideas about the kind of people they ought to be and the kind of person that ought to lead a parish. Because of this, many of them have never imagined that they could do things differently than everyone around them. As one female student said:

> I came from a fundamentalist background and I never questioned male leadership until this class . . . if you didn’t give us those readings I would not have started looking more closely at my actual beliefs.

One male student stated:

> When I was in the corporate world my company had quite a number of women in the senior leadership, but the church isn’t like that . . . I guess it has something to do with the Scriptures.

The challenging questions that can be raised by readings and group conversations are what make critical pedagogy seem threatening to these students. Once students begin to challenge their assumptions, that train of thought often travels farther and farther until it reaches the elements of their lives which they take most for granted. This is a threatening and unsettling process for anyone with any privilege at all. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, the fact that this process is difficult and unsettling does not change the fact that
it is necessary. It is the means by which the classroom becomes empowering and equipping. One student expressed it this way, “If I’m going to live honestly, I really do have to question my hidden assumptions . . . I might really realize that there’s choices that are open to me that I didn’t realize.”

Students Feel Helpless to Change the Future
The second theme that emerged from the focus group is that students feel like they are helpless to change the future. Students were asked to give feedback from the discussion in class about the role of women and men in the church, and two of the responses in particular shed light on students’ general opinions about this matter. The first response is from a male student and the second response is from a female student:

We can talk about this safely in class . . . and yeah, you’re right, but the denomination won’t let women serve as senior pastors as it is stated in the denominational constitution.

I think we’ve done all we can as women on this issue. It’s up to the guys who are sympathetic to our situation to go to bat for us . . . there’s nothing more we can do about it. I feel a sense of helplessness, but that’s the reality; it is what it is!

The students in the focus group reacted in ways that deny the possibility that things can be other than the way they are. Working with the readings, discussing the issue in class, and asking students to imagine themselves otherwise revealed how deeply they accepted the idea that things cannot change. Although students from both positions were able to identify the power issues at play, all of the students also felt helpless to address the issue of religious leadership. A comment from one student who held a complementarian position is revealing, “Well, you can’t do anything that might get you fired in the future.” However, one female student responded by asking, "When do we stop putting our own income and privilege above any other consideration?"

There is Dissonance between Students’ Beliefs and their Practices
The final major theme centres on the sense of hypocrisy that some students felt about this issue. That is to say, some of the students in the focus group came to the conclusion that they believe one thing about the roles of men and women in the church but they actually do another. This is hypocrisy, and the experience of hypocrisy between self and action causes dissonance (Aronson, 1999).

All the students in the focus group confirmed that I caused considerable cognitive dissonance in the class. Cognitive dissonance happens when students encounter information that conflicts with what they currently know or believe, resulting in mental discomfort. One student said this:

You caused a lot of tension in the class on this issue. You went from one extreme to the other . . . I thought you were trying to get us going and doing something to make us learn a point.
In the classroom and in the focus group, I observed that problem-posing caused cognitive dissonance in phases two and three of Wink’s codification model—when I identified and investigated a problem within students’ own lives (phase two), and when I tried to get students on board so we could solve the problem together (phase three). The experience of dissonance is psychologically aversive (Elliot & Devine, 1994), and Reeve (2005) observes that “just how psychologically uncomfortable cognitive dissonance is depends on its magnitude” (p. 270). The psychological discomfort that students experience typically leads them to reduce or resolve the dissonance in some way, either by revising existing beliefs or by ignoring the new information. According to Harmon-Jones and Mills (1999), there are four ways to reduce dissonance: (1) remove the dissonant belief; (2) reduce the importance of the dissonant belief; (3) add a new consonant belief; and (4) increase the importance of the consonant belief. The students from the focus group did in fact try to reduce their cognitive dissonance as described in the ways above. The two women who held the complementarian view of the roles of men and women in ministry leadership responded by trivializing the experiences of women in ministry by arguing that other women see the truth of Scripture and act accordingly by subordinate themselves to men (thereby reducing the importance of the dissonant belief). The five male students in the focus group who held the complementarian view of the roles of men and women in ministry leadership responded as indicated in Table 1:

**Table 1: Cognitive Dissonance of the Five Male Students**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Male Students</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Changing their minds and view that there are no scriptural reasons for women not to share in the leadership of the church, or come to believe that weighing the arguments of the egalitarian view of the role of women and men that the traditional view is more true to the intent of Scripture (thereby removing the dissonant belief).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trivializing the experiences of women in ministry by arguing that other women see the truth of Scripture and act accordingly by subordinate themselves to men (thereby reducing the importance of the dissonant belief).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reading further articles that favor the egalitarian view of women in ministry that deal with the sociological factors of women in leadership or disprove their competency for leadership (thereby adding a new consonant belief).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Realizing if women are successful in leadership in the corporate world, why cannot women succeed in church leadership (thereby increasing the importance of the consonant belief).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

*What I Have Learned: Implications for Improving My Practice*

The explanations and descriptions that I have offered in my account show how I used the action research approach to describe critical pedagogy and to improve my practice. The results of this research give me reason to believe that I might have disrupted my students' prior knowledge and influenced their learning. Although I am pleased that some of the students in the focus group are learning to look more closely at their beliefs and assumptions, I realize that this is just the beginning. I am not under the illusion that change happens overnight or even over a course. Instead, constructing consciousness is an ongoing process in which there is always something to learn about oneself and how one relates to others in the world. What I learned about myself as I used action research as critical pedagogy in these two classes is that I also need to know and challenge my own assumptions. As the professor, I need to demonstrate that I can do this so that students will be able to do the same. For me, this happened in the classroom when I shifted from a transmission to a social reform perspective using a problem-posing strategy. Using this strategy is one way to facilitate students’ effective participation (Moustakim, 2007). It requires fostering a more democratic relationship between the students and the professor. Although I do not think that I have completely figured out this power relationship yet, I do think that I am moving in the right direction. Friere (1992) speaks about the significance of humanizing the relationship between learner and facilitator. I did this by demythologizing the professor as knowledge expert and endorsing instead the important role that students play in the learning-and-teaching situation. One student from the focus group affirmed this by commenting, “The last class that we had was probably the most interesting, because it was very engaging and interactive.” Keeping all of this in mind, I will continue on this path using the findings from these two classes and design an entire course with a critical pedagogical framework.

Although change does not happen instantly, and although many students are making small movements towards change, the students in the focus group nevertheless felt powerless against the status quo. Before the course, my students were resigned to inequities not only for others but also for themselves. This is because they saw the situation as beyond their control, as if it were an inherent and fixed fact. After the second class, I asked students to do a three-minute reaction paper of their learning from the class (Gross-Davis, 1993). As these two excerpts show, the reactions were quite telling:

This whole issue of women and men in ministry seems so unfair and in some cases it is. It may not be fair but it is how our churches seem to be working.

I see these realities and I think we need to change some things in the church regardless of the realities out there—we are hurting people.

Before the course, my students were so immersed in their own religious culture and its unchallenged assumptions that they failed to question how and why the current conditions exist. However, when I started to change my teaching perspective and problem-posing, that caused cognitive dissonance, and change began to take place. This is evident in the two
quotations above, but it is especially clear in the following confession that a male student gave to the focus group:

In class, I was very strong in my view of male leadership in the church. I must have seemed rigid, inconsistent and offensive to some. How [the professor] led the last two classes forced me to look at the Scriptures again and [understand] some of the experiences of women in the class . . . I can start to see the egalitarian view is a legitimate position. I’ll need to come back to some of you for being overzealous . . . I’m sorry!

With help from Reeves (2005), I have realized that a student’s degree of resistance to changing his or her beliefs depends upon three things: (1) how intimately a student feels about an issue; (2) how important or central the issue is to the student’s view of self; and (3) how much pain and cost the student must endure in order to change. Therefore, from a learning perspective, reality, importance, and personal cost work to support students’ beliefs while dissonance stirs up a belief system and puts pressure on hypocritical ways of thinking and behaving (Reeves, 2005). In other words, change is about a psychological competition—reality versus dissonance—that has motivational implications.

It could be claimed that in any class professors attempt to persuade students to a certain viewpoint and that all disciplines have biases that are woven into the methodology and content of the field (Kanpol, 1994; Trelstad, 2008). Having acknowledged this, how can I evade a colonial type of conversion as part of higher education?

First, I have to admit that I am trying to convince students of the significance and practicality of specific approaches to the body of knowledge (Trelstad, 2008). Students see me as the authority and want to be guided by my “expert” judgment (Moustakim, 2007, p. 214). One of the students in the focus group made this clear, “It’s okay to hear from what other students have to say in class, but in the end, you have more knowledge and you are here to teach us and tell us what we should read.” When I am transparent and honest about my personal bias and the biases of the discipline, I can start to establish my own trustworthiness. If students understand what they are walking into, they can decide whether to remain on a specific line of inquiry or not.

Second, there is a distinction between persuasion and intimidating forms of power, and professors must err on the side of the former (Trelstad, 2008). I must be mindful of the power relationship that exists between my students and myself and take care not to exploit it. Critical pedagogy speaks on the issue of power by attending to the overt and inherent power structures within institutional practices. For instance, I have chosen what to read and designed the learning, and I evaluate student progress. I have the responsibility to create the meaning-making opportunities that the class investigates together as a learning community.

In addition, as it relates to the power dynamics of the classroom, critical pedagogy deconstructs objectivity in favour of understanding the class environment as a place of rich multivocality (Giroux & McLaren, 1996). Critical pedagogy deconstructs monolithic truths
and singular pivotal points of authority to examine power relationships (Trelstad, 2008). The true power of the professor hinges on students giving trust and authority that is thoughtfully informed (Trelstad, 2008). However, if students do not extend trust to professors, then professors can no longer be effective. For me, this emphasizes that the interpersonal relationship between students and professors is an important basis for learning as I move to a social reform teaching perspective.

**NOTES**
1. I am aware of the problematic nature of gathering data from students, especially if I am eventually awarding a grade for the course. In this article, validity is seen as a matter of degree rather than an absolute state (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Thus, extreme care has been taken to minimize invalidity and maximize validity by way of the methodology and research design so that there is confidence and authenticity to the collected data (Feldman, 2003).

**REFERENCES**


References


**Biographical note:**

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