

Management education: Critically, dialectically, metaphorically

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to identify pedagogical processes that will support critical management education. It examines the underlying dialectical nature of metaphor that can be harnessed in order to encourage critical thinking in management students. The paper makes particular reference to Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of dialectics. Gadamer argued that understanding and language have a dialogical structure; this paper contributes to the field by examining how this dialogical process is enacted through metaphor and by drawing out the implications for critical management pedagogy. The originality of the paper is its location of the debate on critical management education in the context of dialectics and metaphor. Its practical value is the identification of dialectical teaching processes that encourage criticality.

Keywords: metaphor; dialectics; discourse; Ricoeur; critical management education

Introduction

This paper develops themes that have been discussed previously in the *International Journal of Management Education*. In an earlier volume of this journal, Turner (2006, p. 4) noted that it is difficult to deconstruct critical thinking in teaching and learning, observing "a tendency to articulate the rhetoric of critical thinking as a central component of learning, without a clear identification of its characteristics or, in particular, specification of how to encourage or assess its development in the classroom". This article responds to these concerns by defining and discussing critical thinking in the context of management education. Also in this journal, Harrison (2006) argued that the dialectical process of questioning is important for learning. The current paper develops this theme by examining the dialectical nature of metaphor and exploring the implications for management learning.

The article aims to identify dialectical and metaphorical processes for critical management education. In pursuance of that aim, Ricoeur's philosophy of dialectics and metaphor is examined. The structure of the paper is as follows. Criticality is defined with reference to critical theory, dialectics, critical thinking, critical pedagogy, critical management studies (CMS), and critical management education (CME). There follows a discussion of the relationship between dialectics and metaphor, and their implications for CME.

Criticality

Critical theory

Critical theory challenges oppressive institutions and practices; promoting critical reflection on them (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996). It is reflective, enlightening and emancipatory, "opening the doors to new possibilities by exploring unexamined assumptions and comparing these with the resonance of lived experience" (Carr, 2000, p. 216). Critical theory presupposes, and is imbued with, a dialectical vision (Carr, 1989) so to understand it requires an understanding of dialectics (Carr, 2000). Plato developed the Socratic art of dialogue by privileging dialectics as an account and foundation of knowledge, arguing that it is the highest form of knowledge; similarly, Gadamer (1981) argued that dialectics was behind all epistemology and methodology, and that dialogue was the key to all knowledge and understanding. However, Gadamer's (1981, p. 57) assertion of the "dialogical structure of all understanding" begs the question of how it works out in practice and he calls for an examination of how the "dialogical structure of language" is enacted. Accordingly, this paper examines the dialectical nature of metaphor.

Critical thinking and pedagogy

Critical thinking is what makes higher learning distinctive and involves reflecting on existing knowledge from the perspective of newer knowledge (Turner, 2006). A critical pedagogy enables learners to interpret an organisation and its environment from more than one perspective (Dehler *et al.*, 2001). It involves problematising (Mezirow, 1991) and questioning the assumptions (Mingers, 2000) that are embodied in

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theories and practices; foregrounding processes of power and ideology; confronting spurious claims of rationality and objectivity; revealing sectional interests; and working towards the realisation of a just, fair and democratic society (Reynolds, 1999). Critical pedagogy aims to transform the person and society by integrating critical analysis and collective action (Fenwick, 2005). In the classroom, the process includes a critical treatment of management theory and practice; non-hierarchical structures, procedures and methods; a critical learning process; and reflexivity (Reynolds, 1997).

Critical management education

CME draws from a plurality of traditions and is fractured by multiple divisions, so there is no single unitary critical position; furthermore, the domain is concerned with continuous critique, including a reflexive critique of itself (Fournier & Grey, 2000).

Given the complex and contested nature of management theories and practices, Grey and French (1996, p. 10) recognise the importance of a “more ‘dialectical’ style of pluralism” in management pedagogy. CME includes the debate and dispute of differences in values, roles and interests (Reynolds, 2000). It would be contradictory to teach a critical curriculum through traditional pedagogy and so CME requires a learning design that is commensurate with that perspective (Reynolds, 2000). Accordingly, CME redefines both the content and process of learning, while stimulating student involvement (Grey *et al.*, 1996).

CME is both emancipatory and social in its perspective, concerned with questioning assumptions and foregrounding the processes of power and ideology (Perriton & Reynolds, 2004). It challenges power relations (Fenwick, 2005); questions economic expansion and its consequential inequalities, hierarchies, and gender roles (Reynolds, 1999); and analyses the social, moral and political significance of management, challenging management practice, instead of seeking to sustain it (Grey & Mitev, 1995).

A critical approach to management education questions existing structures and practices (Reynolds & Vince, 2004). Accordingly, management lecturers should also question their own practice by considering that research data and established theories are not the sole or most significant sources of learning: just as valid are the collective experiences of managers - not least because drawing on such experience enables managers to critique actual and current organisational practices (Reynolds & Vince, 2004).

Using metaphor and dialectic in classroom discussion can provide an important device in support of the questioning of assumptions, theories and practices, which is at the heart of a critical pedagogy, which in turn is the basis of CME.

The relationship between dialectics and metaphor

The *noun* “discourse” refers to the communication of thought by speech and the faculty of conversing, involving comparison, reasoning, understanding, and mental movement and progress (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009). The *verb* discourse’ means to converse about a matter with others, reasoning and moving from premises to conclusions (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009).

This section turns to the particular aspect of discourse that is the concern of this paper, by examining the dialectical nature of metaphor. Commensurate with the etymological ancestry of the verb discourse (mental movement and process), metaphor transports thought (Chia, 1996) and carries meaning (Höpfel, 2000). In doing so it enables dialogue and new insights (Morgan, 1993). The trope expands the horizon of understanding by transferring a name from its normal context to an unfamiliar one, so that it “acquires new expressive possibilities” (Sampaio, 1998). A metaphor is polysemous, allowing it to present meanings together (Ricoeur, 1973).

According to Ricoeur (1977), one of several dialectical traits in discourse is that between the paradigmatic (the semiotic signs in the system, such as the metaphoric imagery of a monkey) and the syntagmatic or semantic (the specific formation of words in which the meaning of the sentence is achieved, as in “that child is a monkey!”). With respect to the syntagmatic, words take on new qualities by virtue of being set together. That is why their meaning has to be guessed at every time, within the context of each unique sentence: there is little acquired stability on which to build.

Our experience of using a dictionary illustrates this point. For example, consulting the Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2008), we find that the noun “monkey” refers to various species of monkey (such as a rhesus), a type of tree (monkey-puzzle tree), a misbehaving child, or a slang term for money or mechanics (who may also use a monkey wrench). Monkey business is unacceptable or dishonest behaviour, a monkey suit is a man’s formal evening attire, and brass monkey weather is extremely cold. As a verb, the word can mean to mimic but if you were monkeying about/around, you would be engaging in silly and careless activity. Additionally, if I were to make a monkey out of you, then I would be making you appear stupid. So words take on various meanings in the context of different sentences.

The significance of this pair of traits (the paradigmatic and syntagmatic) to metaphor is that the trope is a sort of syntagma, because its meaning results from a specific interaction of words in a sentence. Metaphor relies upon discourse because it is there that it acquires meaning: the reader iterates between a metaphor and its context to discover a novel meaning (Ricoeur, 1981a).

Any word brings to the sentence a potential for meaning, an open texture and a plural identity, but a sufficient identity for the word to be re-identified as the same in different contexts. In the interaction between the word and the sentence, the potential meanings of the word are constrained by the sentence, which mediates the actual meaning. Thus, there is a play between the word's mutability and plurivocity of meaning on the one hand, and sensitivity to context within the sentence on the other. The sentence reduces the polysemy of the word, with the context filtering out surplus meaning, so that only part of the semantic field is used and the word becomes semantically pertinent to other words, sculpting relatively univocal discourse from polysemic words. However, in the case of metaphor, polysemy is somewhat increased, inverting the operation of the above process whereby the sentence singularises the meaning of a word: the context that turns polysemous words into univocal discourse also creates metaphorical effects from them (Ricoeur, 1981a).

The innovative nature of metaphor lies in its production of a new semantic pertinence by means of an impertinent attribution (Ricoeur, 1983a), that is, it produces new meaning by transferring words to an apparently irrelevant context. In order to understand a metaphor, we need to be aware of its context - indeed it can only be noticed as a metaphor within its contextual setting (Dickie, 1971). For example, the word monkey by itself is not really a metaphor at all, but when the word is recontextualised (for example, from a jungle to my family) it acquires the status of a metaphor (as in "my son is a little monkey").

Metaphor involves a *focus* (a word that changes meaning) and a *frame* (the word is framed by a predicate), producing a dialectical tension in meaning. The trope is "the outcome of a debate between *predication* and *naming*; its place in language is between words and sentences" (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 133). It is a mistake to conceive of metaphor as a word (the word monkey is not a metaphor): instead, there are only metaphoric utterances (as in "that child is a monkey!"), in which there is a tension between two opposed interpretations of the utterance; "it is the conflict between these two interpretations that sustains the metaphor" (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 50). The effect can be compared with stereoscopic vision, in that several layers of meaning are noticed (Ricoeur, 1977).

Metaphor relates to dialectics by exemplifying the unity and interpenetration of opposites: it epitomises the dialectical nature of thinking through the juxtaposition of opposing concepts that alters their meaning (Bloor, 1971). The trope contains three kinds of dialectical tension: within the statement (between focus and frame), between identity and difference in the interplay of resemblance, and that between literal and metaphoric interpretations (Ricoeur, 1977).

Differing from other forms of discourse in terms of its novelty, metaphor challenges accepted denotations and creates a radically new and singular connotation that unifies the possible meanings to which it refers (Ricoeur, 1977, 1981a). The trope possesses the essence of dialectics, which Carr (2005) defines as the simultaneous perception of wholes and conflicting parts, and reciprocity between the old and the new. Critical theory seeks to change reality (Carr, 2000) and metaphor supports this task, its polysemy shattering and changing reality by shattering and increasing language (Ricoeur, 1973).

Finally, it should be noted that metaphor, dialectics and critical theory are misunderstood when reduced to a simple duality of opposed meanings. For example, in her analysis of dialectical tensions and rhetorical tropes in negotiations, Putnam (2004) explains the relationship between the tropes and dialectic in binary terms. However, metaphor exhibits plurality not duality of meaning, enabling multiple perspectives (Cornelissen, 2005). Similarly, the dialectical logic of critical theory involves the emergence of contradictions that promote the generation of a new totality (Carr, 2000). Dialectics transcends the binary oppositional thinking that pervades Western thought, contributing to a critical theory that affords multidimensional perspectives (Carr, 2000).

Implications of metaphor for the process of CME

So far, the dialectical nature of metaphor has been examined, but what are the implications for critical management education? Eleven key learning lessons are proposed.

Metaphor and critical theorising

Metaphor mediates the dialectical nature of critical theorising: its tensive use of language upholds a tensive conception of reality (Ricoeur, 1976). For example, stating that an organisation is a psychic prison (Morgan, 1996) does not mean that it is literally a prison - with cells, barred windows and high walls - but that working there stunts the imagination and conveys a sense of powerlessness. The emergent meaning of metaphor does

not draw from pre-existing similarities but rather induces such similarities (Black, 1955), between the organisation and the prison in the above example. Such metaphor provides the management student with stereoscopic vision, an ability to see things from different points of view and to synthesise these perspectives (Ricoeur, 1981b). Critical thinking¹ includes the ability to use contradictory information (Bowell & Kemp, 2002), which metaphor can help to convey and resolve. Metaphor involves the resolution of an enigma, which is constituted by the resolution of semantic dissonance (Ricoeur, 1976). The contradiction in metaphor (e.g. organisation/psychic prison) produces energy that forces the mind to jump the rails, allowing it to critique current perspectives and to appreciate new ones (Elbow, 1986).

The creative nature of metaphor not only highlights the dangers of single constructions of the world in teaching management and but also cautions against conceiving of dialectical approaches in binary terms. Dialectical thinking is not concerned with mutually exclusive choices but instead opens up other possibilities (Carr, 2005). Thus it would be easy to teach critical theory in the form of a one-sided partiality for employees that is simply the flip-side of mainstream theory's focus on managers. Instead of developing intellectual independence in students, the teaching of critical theory could end up favouring only certain interest groups. While ostensibly emphasising critique it could simply advocate a particular form of politics and intervention in organisations. Management students should not receive critical theory in stereotypical form, opposed to mainstream approaches; otherwise they will simply engage in rote-learning of yet another theory and not develop critical understanding.

The metamorphosis of language and reality

According to critical theory, the social milieu is dialectical, with social reality constantly being transformed by human consciousness (Carr, 2000). There is a similar dynamic between language and social reality in metaphor. Metaphor extends the polysemous nature of words over time (Reagan & Stewart, 1978). At first, the trope introduces novelty to the lexicon but subsequently it fades when a speech community uses it in the same way as literal meaning. Then it dies with the declining tension between literal and metaphorical meaning, at which point the metaphor adds to the previous polysemy of the word. Equally, the polysemous nature of many of the words that we use is the result of previous metaphor, which constantly produces new meanings that merge into our familiar present world. Ricoeur concludes that metaphor shatters and changes our reality by shattering and increasing our language, so that "with metaphor we experience the metamorphosis of both language and reality" (Ricoeur, 1973, p. 111). Therefore, it plays a key role in dialectical thought, which decrees the obsolescence of cherished concepts (Goulet, 1974) and the development of new ideas. Management students can be encouraged to observe the constitutive role of metaphor in organisations and to introduce new metaphors to describe them (such as Morgan's psychic prison, noted earlier). In this way, metaphors can challenge existing concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and help students to develop a creative and imaginative approach to organisations (Morgan, 1996), management (Morgan, 1993) and theorising (Morgan, 1989).

Praxis and metaphorisation

Whereas traditional theory formalises thought, separating it from action, critical theory is concerned with praxis (Carr, 2000), which can be described as "a synthetic product of the dialectic between theory and practice" (Heilman, 2003, p. 274). The processes of praxis and metaphorisation are closely related. Praxis is concerned with the inter-relationship between theory and practice; similarly, metaphors support the conceptualisation of experience whilst also facilitating understanding through concretising ideas (Lakoff, 1987).

The implication for management learning is that it should foster reflection within the context of work-based projects, where students can develop their own dialectic between theory and practice. They should be encouraged to develop and test theories within their organisations whilst also using these contexts to critically appraise management theories:

"This is the importance of praxis, where the theoretical is not separated from practice, but instead what is encouraged is the interplay of experience and reflection which becomes focused on concrete situations. Critical theory and its dialectical logic work hand-in-glove in such a fundamentally important dynamic." (Carr, 2000, p. 217)

Furthermore, inconsistencies between practices and theories should be explored (Reynolds, 1999). The aim is to create a "dialectic of the universal and concrete" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 51), where the concrete and abstract operate "as opposites which interrelate dialectically in the act of reflection" (Freire, 1970, p. 105).

Enabling critical discourse

Metaphors of management learning

Metaphors of management learning can enable or disable the process of critical discourse. Metaphor is often viewed solely as a characteristic of language but it is also a pervasive aspect of how we think and act (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981). For example, if we metaphorise argument as war, then our arguments will be structured as

war: attack, defence and counterattack. Aggressive argumentation has its advantages (e.g., by engendering criticality) and disadvantages (e.g., the hegemony of the powerful and alienation of the powerless). However, in highlighting one aspect of a concept - conceiving of argument as war - metaphor hides other aspects that are incoherent with it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981). So the learning environment may be enhanced if critical argument is conceived in terms of other metaphors, such as a tango, a kaleidoscope or a weather system.

Metaphors are suffused with ideology and in that respect they can enable or disable the content of critical discourse. In his book *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, Lakoff (2002) argues that conservatives and liberals hold two different conceptual models of morality, the former having a "Strict Father" morality in which people are made good through self-discipline and hard work, while the latter have a "Nurturing Parent" morality, where people are cared for; both groups see governance through different metaphors of the family. Thus, management students must reflect on the underlying metaphors of their own discourse if they are going to succeed in critically reflecting on their ideological assumptions. The analysis of discourse is very important here because critical thinking calls into question the language used, the form of argument, and the validity of premises and assumptions (Mingers, 2000).

Fostering dialogue

Enabling a critical approach to management learning involves fostering dialogue, attending to "the tensions and strains that inevitably arise from contradictions, oppositions and negations" (Carr, 2000, p. 217). Antidialogical action involves the subject's conquest of another person, transforming them into a "thing", whereas in dialogical action subjects cooperate together in transforming the world (Freire, 1970). Therefore, debate should be the pre-eminent vehicle for critical management learning.

The dialogical structure of language has implications for how lecturers foster discussions with and amongst students. A key strategy in management education is to promote a dialectic of questioning and answering. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, a question is something that a student has to understand when formulating an answer (Gadamer, 1981). Secondly, a dialectic of question and answer, with its "tireless self-correction of all abstract oneness", (Gadamer, 1981, p. 60) limits the dogmatic claim of formal course theories. The critique of ideology has a dialectical structure, belonging to the social process that it criticises, while correcting and dismantling it. It is important to trace the interests each theory is rooted in - each one is a response to a prior question, so the only way to understand it is to grapple with the prior question that it attempted to answer and reach out to broader contexts of meaning - in order to achieve "an inner tension between our anticipations of meaning and the all-pervasive opinions" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 107).

Another key strategy is to encourage a dialectic between explanation and understanding (Ricoeur, 1976), by encouraging students to explain their own theories of management, compare these with more formal sources of knowledge and then comprehend these interpretations as a whole. Furthermore, lecturers should reconceive their role from teaching to facilitating a "dialectic of mutual recognition" (Gadamer, 1981, p. 33), given the inevitable tension between the democratic principles of critical pedagogy and the authority embedded in the educator's role (Reynolds, 1999).

The vivification of language

Metaphor vivifies language (Ricoeur, 1977) and "gives a body, a contour, a face to discourse" (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 130). It "reigns... in the field of sensory, affective, aesthetic and axiological values which make the world one that can be *inhabited*" (Ricoeur, 1983a, p. 186). According to the analogy theory of thought, the process of thinking is not an evident phenomenon that is close to us, but is only reached indirectly, such as through metaphorical ways of talking and thinking (Haaparanta, 1992). Thus metaphor's concretisation of abstract ideas can aid comprehension in the learning environment.

Ricoeur claims that symbols, in which the dialectic of power and form takes place (combining abundant representation of meaning with being rooted in the world), are far more powerful than language, which "only captures the foam on the surface of life" (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 63)². Metaphor is just the linguistic surface or procedure in which symbolic power is deposited. However, the advantage of metaphor is that it organises and explicates the implicit semantics of the symbol. The trope provides management students with a means to tangibilise their tacit experience in order to understand it more clearly and to share it with their peers in the classroom.

The ignition of imagination

Linking to the previous point, the trope sparks imagination, thinking, conceptualisation and interpretation (Ricoeur, 1977). Like a novel, it engages the student in a different kind of reality, presenting the subject in a novel way (Gass, 1970). Metaphor involves a dialectic between discourse and the word, creating fecundity in meaning; it is a strategy in discourse which divests itself of description to liberate its function of discovery (Ricoeur, 1977). Metaphor contributes to the growth of knowledge through the absurd conjunction of concepts (Bloor, 1971). It involves "commerce between thoughts... a transaction between contexts" (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 80). The acquisition and exploration of new knowledge require a dialectical modification of language

use and such dialectical changes of reference act as a vehicle for reporting new knowledge (Boyd, 1993).

Recontextualisation

The trope is itself a metaphor for critical management learning. Metaphoric utterances deviate from the literal meaning of words - the strategy is that of "bizarre predicates" (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 130). Ricoeur (1983a, p. 183) argues that "before being a deviant naming, metaphor is a peculiar predication" that creates semantic innovation (e.g., the word monkey is not a metaphor; it is the unusual recontextualisation of the word within the remainder of the sentence that produces the metaphoric effect, as in "that child is a little monkey"). Similarly, critical thinking involves changing what the student does in relation to particular contexts, "reflecting on existing knowledge in a relational manner and reconsidering information from the perspective of newer knowledge gained" (Turner, 2006, p. 5). Critical management students are those who re-predicate their work experience within the context of other experiences and theories, and ask impertinent questions to uncover and question assumptions. This act of re-predication produces a jarring of ideas and fosters a critical approach to both theories and work experiences.

Critical textual analysis

The trope is a metaphor for the critical reading of texts. The intersection between management texts and the world of their readers can produce a conflictive fusion of horizons, whether the texts provide ideological confirmation of the established order or social criticism; this dialectic is mirrored by that of the texts themselves, with their dialectic between sedimentation of meaning and received paradigms on the one hand, and the proliferation of divergences and deviations in individual texts on the other (Ricoeur, 1983b).

The process of understanding a metaphor is the key to understanding larger texts: both involve processes of interpretation, reference and the projection of a world. The explication of metaphor contributes to the interpretation of the whole work, while the understanding of metaphor is enlightened by the whole text (Reagan & Stewart, 1978). The dialectic between metaphor and the whole text initiates another dialectic: a hermeneutical circle between the projected worlds and the expansion of a student's self-understanding in front of these novel worlds.

Critical theory involves reciprocity between moment and totality, particular and universal (Carr, 2000), revealing "factors behind the so-called 'facts'" (Carr, 2005, p. 9). Equally, dialectical thought takes the whole into account (Carr, 2000), moving beyond dualism to step within the framework of an argument to offer its critique (Carr, 2005). For example, it is important to ask students to what extent their text-books are management-orientated, neglecting the information needs of lower-level employees. Should theory be a resource for managers or all participants in the organisation? Are these texts describing or constituting organisational reality? Are they challenging or reinforcing existing socio-economic relations (Thompson & McHugh, 1995)? Are these theories simply a resource for organisational change or are they serving power interests? Do management textbooks simply inform students about the various options to be considered when restructuring organisations, or do they question if restructuring is more than rationalisation, and more of a struggle for resources, and the assertion and preservation of powerful interests (Thompson & McHugh, 1995)? Such a dialogical relationship with the texts can help students to increase their capacity for reflexivity - especially if they are encouraged to contrast those texts with their own experience. This kind of approach is commensurate with Freire's proposal of a "dialectical relation between reading the world and reading the word", which leads to rewriting the world and transformation (Jackson, 2007, p. 205).

Is it possible to have a dialogical relationship with texts? The reciprocity and mutuality that characterises dialogue is undermined by the spatial and temporal distance between texts and their readers (Endres, 2001). So critical literacy involves not only unpacking the interests hidden within texts but also:

"learning how to interpret spatially, temporally, culturally, and linguistically distanced perspectives. It requires learning how to have dialogues with texts, sympathetically interpreting their perspectives while allowing one's own interests to bring them to life." (Endres, 2001, p. 412)

Critically reading a text becomes a metaphoric experience, a re-predication of meaning within the new contexts of students' personal and professional experiences.

Theoretical models

There is a kinship between metaphors and theoretical models, where we change our language about a subject to see it differently and reveal new relationships (Black, 1962). Models have a sense (internal organisation) and a reference (they say something about something) (Ricoeur, 1976). They provide a lens with which to see a new interpretation, redescribing reality while overthrowing previous interpretations. Models are more than teaching aids as they are incorporated into the meaning of theories and their truth claims. They are closely associated with "insistent metaphors"; those closest to the symbolic depths of our existence, revealing what things are like because of their organisation into networks and hierarchical levels (Ricoeur, 1976).

Metaphors enable theorising by reducing data and producing patterns, helping us to step back and take stock (Miles & Huberman, 1994). They connect findings to theory; Glaser (1978) recommended using metaphorical gerunds (verbal nouns ending in “ing”) to make sense of social phenomena (e.g., servicing, bargaining, becoming) and to move from facts to processes.

Linguistic competence

Lecturers can assess the competence of management students in using metaphor as a vehicle for understanding, communicating and influencing change. The trope shifts meaning, making communication effective and allowing comprehension of conceptual relationships (Ricoeur, 1977). The application of metaphor is a necessary competence in critical theorising: “if metaphor is a competence, a talent, then it is a talent of thinking” (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 80). This is because, in metaphor, the fecundity of the imagination is linked to that of language (Ricoeur, 1979). The inherent semantic innovation of the trope is related to the student’s productive imagination, which gives birth to new metaphors.

In metaphor, the competence of imagination creates a conflict of proximity and difference. The salience for critical management learning is the tension that is developed between the ideas that metaphor holds together. It is this synthesis of the heterogeneous (Ricoeur, 1979) that brings critical management education close to metaphor. In both cases, the new thing springs up in language. A living metaphor is created with a new pertinence in the predication, while in critical management education new (in)congruences are developed (again, the organisation/psychic prison [in]congruence is illustrative of this).

Critical theory is concerned with multidimensional knowledge (Carr, 2000) that can be managed through the use of metaphor, which integrates multiple meanings to produce an intelligible whole from miscellaneous perspectives. Metaphor suspends the descriptive referential function, displacing it with the redescription of a reality that is inaccessible to direct description. It involves a dialectic between denotation and connotation, description and redescription, and discovering and creating (Ricoeur, 1981a). Similarly, the function of critical management education is to redescribe - to re-understand leadership, for example, as a situation of power, subjugation and oppression - to facilitate a new “seeing-as” at the epistemological level (e.g. seeing a leader as a tyrant), which could reveal a new “being-as”, disclosing new critical self-perspectives for the student at the ontological level (who may ask questions like “what sort of leader should I be and do I even want to be a leader?”), thus creating a “dialectic between inside and outside” (Ricoeur, 1983b, p. 50).

Students’ use of metaphor makes their creativity available for analysis in assessed work. Furthermore, how they comprehend the metaphors used by their peers can evidence their competence in performing the same semantic innovation, where productive imagination achieves a change in logical distance between ideas, bringing a sudden insight to discourse (Ricoeur, 1983a).

A critical philosophy of management education

Finally, and linking to the previous point concerning logic, to what extent can metaphor contribute to a critical philosophy of management education? Ricoeur’s account of metaphor is in direct conflict with both the strategy and tactics of some philosophers, such as Ryle (1932, 1949)³, whose method is undialectical (Bloor, 1971). In terms of strategy, much of modern philosophy is concerned with rooting out the confusions that result from treating one category as if it was another, colliding with the view that metaphor plays a key role in the development of new concepts. In terms of tactics, Ryle dismisses metaphor on the basis of its literal absurdity. So what can be said in defence of metaphor within this philosophical context?

Admittedly, metaphor is close to what Ryle calls a category mistake, there being a close proximity between the use and abuse of words, but such critical consciousness leads not to disuse but to re-use of metaphors, a search for the best one possible (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 253). Furthermore, Ricoeur argues that metaphor does strike against a prior categorisation by virtue of the fact that it brings together two previously distant semantic fields - but that the new pertinence does not completely abolish the old order; for there to be a metaphor, it is necessary to continue to perceive the previous incompatibility through the new compatibility - “remoteness persists in closeness” (Ricoeur, 1979, p. 131)⁴.

Critical theory sensitises us to the tyranny of the confining nature of some forms of logic (Carr, 2000). Metaphor plays an important role in this respect, with its dialectical tension between proximity and “the power of distanciation that opens up the space of speculative thought” (Ricoeur, 1977, p. 313). Metaphors are emotive so they can be used to challenge mental models (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995), present ideas and insights that might not be available through rational discourse, and help us to get close to experience (Gray, 2007). The trope can assist students in structuring their experience by moving from those things that they do understand to those they do not yet understand, by giving words new applications to cover new dimensions of meaning (Edie, 1963).

It has even been claimed that all mental activities - including ideas, thoughts and logic - are metaphorical (Shibles, 1974). An understanding of the way that metaphor structures our conceptual system can provide an

experientialist perspective on classical philosophical problems, such as the nature of knowledge, meaning, truth, rationality and logic; thus “no account of meaning and truth can be adequate unless it recognizes and deals with the way in which conventional metaphors structure our conceptual system” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981, p. 323). Accordingly, there should be critical reflection on the use of metaphors, which are rooted in assumptions and worldviews (Gray, 2007). Management practice privileges metaphors that disregard its more sinister features (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996) and so the lecturer needs to “give voice to critical metaphors that may serve to challenge accepted management norms, structures and practices” (Gray, 2007, p. 507).

Conclusions

Can a critical management education that confronts vested interests, inequalities and power differentials (Reynolds, 1999) take place within the context of management's preoccupation with rationality (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996), productivity and efficiency (Marsick, 1988)? This paper affirms that it can, if the lecturer is allowed and allows sufficient autonomy to embed the following processes in curriculum design - in conjunction with students. Although the lecturer has vested powers that may inhibit student autonomy, the staff-student relationship should be characterised by democratic principles and non-hierarchical methods of teaching. Students should be involved in the design, delivery and evaluation of learning (e.g., they could be invited to contribute to the marking of each others' assignments).

The content of the curriculum should challenge oppressive institutions and practices - and, in parallel to this, the process of learning should encourage criticality. Instead of students receiving generalised theories and supposed best practices, in order to integrate experience and reflection, there should be an emphasis on what students can learn from their daily interactions with organisations so that they can identify appropriate interventions and draw relevant conclusions. Students should be encouraged to criticise and test theories whilst also developing new ones, for example through the application of grounded theory.

A corollary of dialectics is the privileging of collective learning, the group being the site of interactive debate⁵. This enhances critical discussion skills, which can then be applied in the workplace to effectively challenge senior managers. If they have learnt the skills of dialectical discussion, students will be able to criticise while developing and sustaining (rather than potentially damaging) their relationships with managers when voicing criticisms. The consequential spin-off for organisations is the enhancement of organisational learning when members are able to offer honest but diplomatic critiques and to foster further debate.

A key role of the critical management pedagogue is to problematise theoretical assumptions and question managerial practices. However, there is a danger that this process could strengthen lecturers' power in the classroom if they engage in individual questioning and answering with students. Instead, the aim should be to encourage mutual questioning and interactive debate. Such an approach can help achieve the aim of dialectics, which is to generate more than one perspective. Encouraging critical reflection involves asking the questions that are not normally asked, such as interrogating the presupposition that people resist change, which obscures the potential good reasons why change should be resisted (Reynolds, 1997). Inviting questions from the whole group can help to broaden the range of such enquiry. However, some individuals may lack confidence while others may dominate the discussion. If that is the case, students can practise questioning in pairs to prepare them for more robust and challenging debate within the whole seminar group.

One way to damage dialectical enquiry is to load the student group with a weighty recommended reading list - often with no recommended reading guide. No matter how critical the content, the assumption will be that students have to consume and regurgitate this body of knowledge. Alongside the reading list, there should always be instructions on how to engage in a dialogical relationship with the texts. Importantly, they should not read in isolation, because that would only encourage the consumption of theories. Instead, there should be weekly reading groups, where students can interrogate the assumptions made in their textbooks.

Students could also engage in group assignments that generate alternative perspectives to what they have read. Such assignments should emerge from dialectical arguments in the group and reflect their differences of opinion. Assessment criteria should include their dialogical relationship with content, each other and their readers; empirically substantiated argument; a range of perspectives that include staff, managers and customers; awareness of the interests of minorities; reliability, validity and generalisability of findings; a critical synthesis in the conclusions, and recommendations that are informed by both theoretical and pragmatic considerations. Other groups in the student cohort could work with the lecturer to assess the validity of arguments in the assignment. Lecturers should also assess the competence of management students to use metaphor as a vehicle for understanding in their assignments.

The tentative nature of metaphorical meaning creates open modes of understanding (Morgan, 1993). Furthermore, recognising the prevalence of metaphor can help students to realise that there is no single or absolute truth but to recognise that received truths are layers of interpretation, supported by “a mobile army of metaphors” (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 84). Truths are “illusions which we have forgotten are illusions, they are

metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensual force” (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 81).

Metaphor transports thought (Chia, 1996) and carries meaning (Höpfl, 2000). In doing so, it enables dialogue and new insights (Morgan, 1993) and reorganises minds (Worth, 1981). The trope expands the horizon of understanding by transferring a name from its normal context to an unfamiliar one, so that it “acquires new expressive possibilities” (Sampaio, 1998). A metaphor is polysemous, allowing it to present meanings together (Ricoeur, 1973), but this is both a strength and a limitation. The trope’s uncertain meaning can result in unreliable communication and interpretation (Ramsay, 2004), relativism and subjectivity (Morgan, 1996). It shades out other meanings (Morgan, 1998) and conceals how it shapes thoughts (Kendall & Kendall, 1993) so that it is taken literally and accepted as fact (Nietzsche, 1979). Furthermore, metaphor is suffused with ideologies (of management and the operation of discourse) and can disable critical reflection both on the content of management education and the dialectical process of learning.

It would be inappropriate to unquestioningly advance metaphor as a tool for critical management education. Reflexivity demands that nothing escapes dialectical questioning. We have seen that metaphor is a double-edged sword but that it can be cautiously deployed in the facilitation of dialectical learning. Metaphor can expand minds but even when it controls them, it can present an opportunity for critical management learning, providing that it is in turn the subject of dialectical questioning.

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Endnotes

¹ Critical thinking and critical theory are not synonymous terms; the former involves a searching evaluation and reflexive judgement about a premise, while the latter focuses on the examination and critique of organisations and societies. However, critical thinking can support learning based on the principles of critical theory and can help develop critical understanding.

² Ricoeur (1976) argues that the functioning of metaphor comes close to that of symbols, since the most insistent metaphors intertwine the symbolic infrastructure and metaphoric superstructure.

³ Ryle (1932) dissolved problems by analysing the derivation of inappropriate abstract inferences from ordinary uses of language. Ryle (1949) also argued that the misapplication of an ordinary term can result in a category mistake.

⁴ There is insufficient space here to elaborate on the relationship between literal and metaphoric meaning; instead, the reader is referred to the following literature: Alston (1964), Binkley (1974), Ortony (1975) and Davidson (1978).

⁵ It may be argued that it is not feasible to achieve interactive debate within a large undergraduate student group that has little work experience. However, such debate can be fostered when a large cohort is asked to work in small sub-groups in seminars - or even in pairs in a large lecture theatre. Furthermore, undergraduate students without work experience can be asked to reflect on their experiences as customers and service-users of organisations.

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