

Provocateur Pedagogies in Higher Education: Punks, Pirates and Guerillas!

Teaching in higher education can be considered an act of “becoming”. As academics, we are never complete, our disciplinary knowledge grows, new cohorts of students arrive, and societal issues shape our lens on life, and our teaching and learning. As teachers, we profess to our students the maxim that “every day is a school day”. Yet too often we are myopic in our own quest for alternative pedagogical practice. Should we not push at the boundaries of our disciplines signature pedagogies? Despite the advancement of student centered, constructivist pedagogies, the lectern, information transfer, and summative exams, continue to be too dominant in higher education.

What if we could do teaching and learning in a different way. Can we shape our ‘becoming’, and indeed our students ‘becoming’ through the use of alternative pedagogies. In this Micro CPD I focus on three alternative pedagogies, Punk, Pirate and Guerilla! My interest in considering alternative practice has been driven by my own CPD, mainly through reading works on higher education policy & practice. Indeed, as Stephen Brookfield ⁽¹⁾ testifies, ‘reading educational literature can help us investigate the hunches, instincts, and tacit knowledge that shape our pedagogy’ (171). That said, the words of our former Vice-Chancellor (1980-1991), Sir Graham Hills, have also been a catalyst- ‘Universities are Socratic by conformity. Dissent is their life blood. No one worthwhile joins a university to be told what to do’ ⁽²⁾. Now re-read the last sentence, this time as if said by John Lydon! (AKA Johnny Rotten of the Sex Pistols). Of note, Hills co-authored book on the establishment of the University of the Highlands & Islands (UHI) calls for a move away from lecture centered learning, lecturers as ‘encyclopedias on legs’, towards, student centered learning, where they are ‘tutors, mentors, and guides’ (56).

Punk

DIY (do it yourself) is said to be at the heart of punk ethic. In ‘*Being punk in higher education: subcultural strategies for academic practice*’ Parkinson ⁽³⁾ provides an analysis of interviews with five higher education teachers (humanities) who self-identify as punks, seeking to uncover their punk and academic identities. He adds his own perspective – ‘I

have always identified with punk practices, ethics and culture, all of which are woven into my lifestyle and worldview' (148). Whilst 'specific examples of applying punk practices pedagogically were relatively sparse' Parkinson's analysis led to three broad themes related to the participants application of punk in their teaching. (1) Performativity-Issues related to resisting the status quo through individual and collective actions (2) Autodidacticism and amateurism-whereby participants sought to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, to resist the techno-rational and banking models of higher education through providing students with agency to engage in self-directed learning (3) Experience and praxis-an emphasis on valuing students' prior learning and promoting experiential learning and reflective practices. Parkinson concluded that the interviewees did show aspects of 'reactionary disposition' and that they had used a 'grand punk narrative' as 'a mythological tool, encapsulating and ennobling their ethical frameworks and validating their responses to the pressures of academic life in a troublesome higher education climate (156).

Torrez ⁽⁴⁾ provides an essay on developing a 'course situated in punk pedagogy and my struggles to understand punk as a pedagogical tool' (131) with a caveat that she is unsure of what punk pedagogy is. She is opposed to the 'banking model' (information transfer) of education as identified by Paulo Friere ⁽⁵⁾ and argues that 'punkademics must fight to preserve counter-hegemonic sites of education within the corporate university' (132). Torrez accounts for a failed attempt to move students away from the banking model given this had been omnipresent in their previous schooling. She concludes that punk pedagogy and critical pedagogy are similar and that to be a 'punkademic is both frightening, and alluring' (141).

Guerilla

Guerilla teaching is a call to arms for primary school teachers to embrace their inner oddball, to be creative in their pedagogy, model curiosity, and bring a joy of learning into the classroom. Lear ⁽⁶⁾ has a healthy disrespect for Government (Ofsted) interventions in UK schools and the associated collateral damage associated with the tyranny of metrics and league tables (teaching to the test). My attraction to going guerrilla is based on my

own ethos of 'just do it', to take risks and to try something different in my learning and assessment practice.

Lear refers to his preparation in the classroom before his pupils arrive: 'just before I open the door, the music will go on. Three tracks (the same ones every morning) that make me smile, or-on a really good day-dance '(30). He explains the need for teachers to radiate happiness and optimism- 'thanks to my morning songs, even if I'm tired and fed up, there's always a smile on my face as the children come in (it's definitely something to try unless you're into hard-core techno-or Lenoard Cohen' (36). In the passage below, replace the words 'classroom with lecture theatre', and 'children with students'!

This book is about a revolution. Not a flag-waving, drum beating revolution, but an underground revolution, a classroom revolution. It's not about changing policy or influencing government; it's about doing what we know to be right, regardless of what we're told. It's a book for people on the ground; people in real classrooms, working with real children, trying to make a real difference (2).

Lear's reference to music struck a chord (pun intended!). For some time, I have used music in my teaching practice. I use music to introduce my students to Victorian engineers and Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) Presidents since 1820, in the spirit of hagiography (David Bowie-Heroes /Foo Fighters-My Hero); and to examine learning lessons from structural failure, including the 1981 Hyatt Regency Hotel walkway collapse (Led Zeppelin-Communication Breakdown) and how complacency in communication can have lethal consequences ⁽⁷⁾. I am not alone in using music in higher education ^(8, 9) and there are empirical studies that have examined the efficacy of doing so ⁽¹⁰⁾.

Pirate

Burgess ⁽¹¹⁾ is a schoolteacher in the USA, he offers guidance for 'mavericks and renegades who are willing to use unorthodox tactics to spark and kindle the flame of creativity and imagination in the minds of the young' (p.xii). In his book -*Teach Like a*

Pirate, he encourages educators to adopt the spirit of pirate mythology, to be bold, take risks and adopt creative practice. Burgess recognizes that we do not sail and navigate our careers alone, he recommends pirates to find a crew and to 'take counsel from a wide variety of people and seek out multiple perspectives' (169).

In *-Kill your PowerPoints and teach like a pirate*, Arvanitakis ⁽¹²⁾ explains his reason for adopting unconventional inductive teaching methods (i.e., flashmob, body percussion) before introducing theoretical concepts in his first-year classroom. His approach is based on affording students' agency and encouraging citizenship through the use of contemporary and relevant case studies. He reaffirms his commitment to pirate pedagogy ⁽¹³⁾ and explains that he has been influenced by critical educator Paulo Freire (1972) and German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927).

In *Teaching Building Services Like a Pirate*, Law ⁽¹⁴⁾ examines the methods by which building services classes can be delivered to fourth-year architecture students. He adopted a PIRATE Act whereby each lecture covered a Threshold Concept, combined with a PIRATE Aura (passion, immersion, rapport, ask and analyse, transformation, enthusiasm). Law explains that:

When one teaches like a PIRATE the lecture ceases to be a presentation. I think of it more as a performance. This involves planning, musical choreography and rehearsals. All within the constraints of a lecture theatre as a one man show. It is not as daunting as it sounds, and students are more than ready to forgive a failed act when they recognise the effort that has gone in for the good of their learning (98).

Law employs music and rhythm to teach space planning in buildings and with particular reference to the location of toilets and associated pipework (blocked and leaking) he developed a 'Sewer Rap' to emphasize that 'shit happens'. In an exercise to teach building codes in relation to fire egress and firefighting requirements he goes further off-piste! 'I arranged for the fire alarms to be disarmed and the Tasmanian Fire Service

present whilst I fumigated the lecture theatre with a disco fog machine. I warned them that in an actual fire they would not be able to breathe, shout or see as they were to make their way out of the theatre, negotiating the steps on all fours with one lungful of air'(99).

Smith ⁽¹⁵⁾ goes into a full pirate costume in her quest to alleviate student boredom at the University of Notre Dame. She developed a range of constructivist active learning exercises to teach information literacy skills for a chemistry class. With what must surely be a risk of being lampooned, the pirate outfit is donned, to examine internet piracy, the use of pirate materials, and the university's academic integrity policies. The 'buried treasure' trope is linked to searching for information inside databases.

Punk, Pirate & Guerilla: Constructivist Pedagogy?

I am cognizant that readers may be seeking a description of classroom practices that can be attributed to punk, pirate, and guerilla. Perhaps a toolkit, to guide their own entry to alternative pedagogical practice. I have provided some of my own classroom practice in this paper ⁽¹⁶⁾ and they are consistent with a Constructivist philosophy to teaching practice. Several interventions introduced my civil engineering undergraduates to 'playful learning'-collage, rich picture, newspaper front cover ⁽¹⁷⁾. These interventions could be considered innovative, they may indeed be representative of a punk, pirate, and guerilla philosophy to teaching and learning ⁽¹⁸⁾. Over the piece I have assumed the mantle of 'educational philosopher and provocateur' ^(19, 239). Indeed, my reading of a paper- *The Concept of Pedagogical Innovation in Higher Education* ⁽²⁰⁾ suggests some parallels with other academics who have developed innovative pedagogy. Pertinent to my own practice, and with relevance to punk, pirate, and guerilla pedagogy, two concepts are apparent-- *Novelty* (not following tradition, surprising students, using methods contrary to main tendency) - *Human relations* (taking risks, innovation intimately linked to the teacher's personality, innovation is learning as a professor).

In this article, I started with reference to Stephen Brookfield's *-Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*. As I conclude, I return to his book. Brookfield provides a wise warning to academics who are tempted to go punk, pirate, guerilla. To do pedagogy differently risks upsetting the status quo and the formal and informal power structures in higher education. However, before reading Brookfield's words below, please remind yourself of our former Vice-Chancellor Sir Graham Hills words- 'No one worthwhile joins a university to be told what to do' ⁽²⁾.

Teachers who are seen to be reinventing themselves and their practice can commit cultural suicide without even being aware that this is happening. As they speak about how they are reevaluating their practice or how they're doing things differently, they run a real risk that colleagues will see them as engaged in an act of betrayal. They are whistle-blowers on the culture of stasis -the collective agreement not to rock the boat by asking awkward questions or doing things differently (232).

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