**Autoethnographic Reflections on Critical Practice in Marketing Pedagogy**

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Autoethnography: Critique: Interpellation: Marketing: Pedagogy

**Abstract**

In this commentary, I use selected autoethnographic passages from my life in teaching to reflect on what, if anything, the designation of ‘critical’ might mean in my own practice of marketing education. I draw selectively on some ideas from educational and critical theory, and I invoke Gross and Laamanen’s (2021) excellent piece on the (mis)interpellation of marketing ideology by marketing academics, to reach the conclusion that my personal idea of critical marketing pedagogy is probably closer to Postman and Weingartner’s (1969) notion of classroom education as a subversive practice than it is to any neo-Marxist versions of liberatory pedagogy. Ernest Hemingway (reported in Postman and Weingartner, 1969) suggested that the primary virtue of a writer’s education ought to be the refinement of the students’ ability to detect crap. By nurturing the fundamental transferable life-skill of crap detection, I like to think that marketing can fulfil a worthwhile pedagogic role alongside the other subjects in a liberal intellectual university curriculum.

**Introduction**

Writing more than 20 years ago, Alvesson and Deetz (2000) expressed a dilemma facing management academics. Then, as now, management and business scholars are often regarded not as intellectuals committed to furthering human knowledge and educating students morally as well as intellectually, but as ideologists, whose role is to “…serve dominant groups through socialization in business schools, support managers with ideas and vocabularies for cultural-ideological control at the workplace level, and provide the aura of science to support…managerial domination techniques” (p.84). The dilemma in question is that many management academics no doubt felt then, and do today, that they are committed educationists who work to the same pedagogic ethos as any other subject academician in the university. Indeed, Alvesson and Deetz’s (2000) agenda for qualitative research demonstrates their own deep investment in a sense of their pedagogic integrity as critical educators bent on subverting the ideological force of their own discipline. Marketing academics find ourselves in the teeth of this dilemma as guardians of the management sub-discipline most closely identified with the governing ideology of late capitalism. Many would argue, though, that it is neither moral, nor possible, to subvert the ideology that grants us our status and authority as educators.

In what follows, I use autoethnographic vignettes of my life in education to explore how I have experienced the dual role of ideologist and educator, in order to try to support my tentative conclusion, which is that there is, in fact, no dilemma at all.

**The Worst Students in the College**

Where did that time go? It feels like only last week when the class of 1986 ‘day-release’ BTEC Certificate in Business Studies students were ripping me to shreds for the fun of it. ‘Day-release’ meant that one day per week they were released, not from a prison sentence, but from the tactile discipline of their weekday jobs as apprentice bricklayers, painters and hairdressers, to go to the local Further Education (FE) College to spend all day sitting at desks and listening to words. This was challenging for these non-academic 17 year-olds, and any opportunity to subject a wet-behind-the-ears trainee lecturer like me to a rigorous ritual humiliation was accepted with glee. The wily old hack teachers of the department had assigned me to the most unruly class in the college, knowing that only their default teaching method, verbal dictation, had the respect of these reluctant students. The robotic act of writing down spoken words, read by the lecturer in a monotone from well-worn lecture notes, was almost miraculous in the anaesthetic effect it had on even the most deficit-prone attention spans. I was bent on engaging the students rather than dictating to them, but my colourfully inscribed ‘lantern slides’, the hacks’ mocking term for the Overhead Projection (OHP) sheets that I thought were the cutting edge of Ed Tech, somehow failed to spark the constructive response I had expected. Stress has always hit me right in the tummy and I vividly remember one day wilting against a wall after a particularly torrid teaching session, feeling as if I’d been shot in the solar plexus with a .44 Magnum, thinking “I just can’t do this”.

But it turned out I could do this, after a fashion, notwithstanding a few peptic ulcers along the way. After a few weeks in teaching’s Slough of Despond, this little pilgrim began to understand how to manage a classroom. I even began to enjoy it, and so did the students. In the end, we had a lot of laughs, mostly at my expense, but still. I love it when there’s fun and energy in a classroom. I think one minute of anarchy in 60 can sometimes have more educational value than the other 59 of rigorously lesson-planned decorum. After my street-level education in the dark arts of classroom management, I spent a further eight years teaching teenage students in local FE colleges. The job was poorly paid, but the students made the emotionally gruelling 20 hours a week of classroom teaching just about survivable. They could be great fun, and you felt as if you made a difference. Most of the students were not from wealthy families: some were thrilled just to pass their course, while some others went on to posh unis like LSE. Nearly all my students were successful in their own way and I was proud of that. And they taught me how to teach. In particular, they taught me that knowing something well enough to fudge an exam question was an entirely different order of knowing than knowing it well enough to explain it to a wilfully obtuse class of teenagers.

Ten years before my ulcerous encounter with these challenging students, I had been very like them. I left school aged 16, after some minor errors of judgement, and with the full encouragement of the headteacher, to take up a manual trade, as my father had done before me. I was an apprentice moulder in an iron foundry, crafting the moulds into which molten iron was poured to make manhole covers, machine parts and such. It was a skilled trade, very physical work, and much better paid than lecturing, or it would have been if I’d stuck to it. Education and I had agreed to go our separate ways around the time adolescence struck early in my secondary school career, and even a skilled apprenticeship proved too demanding of my distracted intellect. I resigned and resorted to unskilled labour, that is before I found out that there is no such thing, ‘unskilled’ is just a designation that means they pay less. For example, I learned that the putatively unskilled task of manhandling a wheelbarrow full of bricks across a wobbling matrix of planks in icy rain is an almost impossible feat of balance, coordination and sheer daring. The most able practitioners tended to be chain-smoking alcoholics with chaotic personal lives who were able to perform this act of intuitive bio-mechanical genius at 7AM on any given winter’s morning, while deeply hungover. One good thing about the experience of labouring on building sites in winter is that afterwards, nothing you do for money while warm and dry, feels like actual work.

Looking back now from the vantage point of some thirty-five years in the business studies business, I can see that the critical theorists’ idea of a dominant ideology that must be resisted would have seemed, well, a bit abstract, if I had heard of it when I was starting out in teaching. Nicole Gross and Mikko Laamanen’s (2021) excellent *JMM* duo-autoethnography captures the tension between the role of vocational teacher and critical Marketing Educator, a tension that applies in any of the BizMan subjects. The vocational teacher is contracted to ‘deliver’ the prescribed curriculum and learning outcomes, while the critical educator is committed to invoking wider moral and intellectual concerns for the development not just of the student as student, but of the student as a whole person. It is widely assumed and expected that marketing teachers teach practical skills, but there are points when we encounter a tension between the idea of practical skills, and the broader, critical and liberal educational agenda to which many of us feel morally committed.

Citing Althusser (2014) and Martel, (2017), Gross and Laamanen (2021) describe interpellation, if I understand correctly, as something like the subject’s internalisation of ideological values. “Interpellation outlines how individuals become recruited to an ideology by being *hailed* as a subject and *responding* based on their free will. Althusser’s example is of an individual being hailed on the street (maybe by the police)–‘Hey, you there!’–with the hailed individual, by turning around, (most likely) becoming the subject” (pp. 4-5, citing Althusser, 2014, p. 19). Ideologies, sustained by Ideological State Apparatuses such as educational institutions, act seductively, offering identity and meaning to those who are hailed. For Althusser (2014), we are interpellated into ideologies from before birth. They form our subjectivities and are inevitably political. Even assuming the subject positions of ‘teacher’ and ‘student’ references a political social order. In Althusser’s (2014) Marxist scheme, there is no possibility of an individual subjectivity that is independent of ideology, and no possibility of individual subjectivity (Galloway, 2012). As a result, any liberation from subjugation must be collective, and the possibility of an education that is intellectually and emotionally transformative for the individual, that is, the liberal intellectual ideal that is the basis for our university system, is denied.

This raises a number of contradictions. Paolo Friere’s (1972) structuralist reading of Marx posits that an emancipatory pedagogy has to be based on a dialogue between equals, but formal education settings are inevitably ideologised by the very role of the teacher, even, or especially if the teacher is claiming to be a reflexive agent who can help students to unlock access to a critical understanding of their subject. In merely adopting the subject position of teacher of students, whether espousing a critical or a non-critical stance, we unwittingly reassert the normative ideological order. The very notion of a dominant ideology, then, allows little space for reflexive subjects- all are dupes. Gross and Laamanen (2021) note the contradiction at the heart of the neo-Marxist model of the critical marketing project but insist that “… while interpellation hails and forms a willing ideological subject of marketing, the subject can actively question practice and engage in counterideological acts” (p.2). What, though, can amount to a counterideological act in the context of formal marketing and business management education?

But before I move on to that, let’s go back to my life in the 1980s.

After school, I had a decade of misadventures in employment, training, and education, along with some low-budget wandering abroad with my guitar slung on my back (not quite Cider with Rosie, more Spliffs with Sven). One day, I thought I’d do a course in teaching. My mum had been a schoolteacher, one of the Irish diaspora in the doomed cause of trying to educate the English, so it seemed respectable, and I felt in need of some respect, not to mention a regular income. And I had unfinished business. The formal education I had gained to get me to that point simply entailed passing courses, it hadn’t been what I thought of as Education, with a capital E. There had been no passion or challenge in formal learning for me, no transformation of my world view. I had trouble seeing the meaning in education, unless it was in some way a kinaesthetic experience. Apart from sport, which I enjoyed at school, one of my few happy memories from the classroom was when the English teacher had us read out Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker* and cast me as one of the three protagonists. I forget which character I was, but I had some good lines. Having the attention of the class and hamming it up for laughs was great fun, and Pinter’s comically melancholic worldview somehow seemed true. This felt like Education, or as close to it as I got in school.

At times during that lost decade when the weight of my foregone formal education was weighing especially heavily, I found that I could energise my intellectual curiosity if I made reading a kinaesthetic experience. For example, I was quite taken by Wordsworth’s poem about Tintern Abbey, so I spent a week cycling there with a one-man tent and the great man’s work’s strapped to my back. I wandered cobbled streets in Copenhagen, or was it Amsterdam, clutching Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*, a book I’d found wet through in a gutter during one of my flaneuring expeditions abroad, and I read James Joyce’s *Dubliners* while living on unemployment benefit in London hostels. Wrong country, but the vignettes of city life in *Dubliners* resonated with me as I wandered the London streets, like a ghost, invisible amongst the preoccupied urbanites going about their business. I stayed for a while with other ghosts in a sleazy hostel in King’s Cross. The place was only tolerable for a few weeks at most, even by hostel standards it was filthy and full of dangerous characters. I was allotted a shared room with a taciturn Irishman man. We had two single beds, and one small bedside drawer each for our worldly possessions. One day, trying to make conversation, I asked him how long he’d been staying there. “Ten years” he replied, then he rolled over to go back to sleep. One Saturday night, most of the residents were gathered glumly in the dingy lounge, having drank all the money from Thursday’s dole payment. An ancient Laurel and Hardy movie came on the black and white TV set in the corner of the room, and gradually titters grew to gales, until the whole room shook with roars of laughter at the daft pair’s antics. For a brief moment, we felt connected, a communitas of the damned.

It was teaching those young rogues in FE that took me back to Education, I mean Education with a capital ‘E’, because I became fascinated by the mysterious, rather magical process that seemed to take place. It wasn’t that I thought I was a good teacher - I was too much of a ham for that. But in spite of my hazy sense of classroom decorum, something that felt like Education sometimes seemed to happen. Between the inadequately prepared words and vaguely understood meanings that spewed from the teacher to fill the allotted time, flashes of connection would sometimes occur between words, meaning, and student. It was the weirdest thing. Just now and then, a student who had been written off as hopeless in other classes was suddenly there, present in the moment, in a classroom, engaging with some topic, an entirely different person to the sullen, closed off creature that had begun the term in the last chance saloon of Hackley’s class.

I read lots of stuff to try to better understand what I was saying to the students, so that I could try to say better things, because I wanted to know more about what was happening. I needed to try to be a better teacher because the crap I said, or the way that I said it, seemed to matter. I didn’t read much educational theory, I preferred introductory philosophy, pre-Socratics and The Enlightenment lot mainly, and later, psychology, when the philosophy started to seem too armchair. The pedagogic ideology imposed on us by the teaching certificate lecturers was *student-centred learning*, but they couldn’t really sell it because they couldn’t do it. One memorable lesson was announced with some fanfare - our introduction to the art of using the Overhead Projector, which, apparently, made blackboard and chalk obsolete. Our lecturer, who some Machiavellian HoD had somehow managed to get promoted out of his department into teacher training, ceremoniously placed a carefully drawn slide on the light box, stood directly in the beam, then turned his back to us, expounding obliviously on the art of OHP teaching to a blank wall, with the slide projected on to his back. The lesson ended in chaos, even though it was, in fact, inadvertently successful. While walking animatedly at the front of classes, I’ve fallen arse over tit over waste buckets, I’ve painfully impaled my groin on desk corners, but I don’t think I’ve ever stood in front of the OHP projector beam. When we were farmed out to colleges for our practicals, our lecturers would come to observe and criticise us for not being student-centred enough if we actually told the students anything. All in all, *student-centred learning* seemed to be a pretty pointless game of ‘tell them about X without telling them about X’. Our teachers seemed confused as to whether student-centred learning meant problem-based learning, or learning by elicitation. Not that there’s anything wrong with problem-based learning if the students have had some prior instruction and can work on a closely defined problem, like reversing a truck into a parking bay without hitting a bollard, or extracting an appendix without excessive blood loss. Learning by elicitation is fine too, if you’re Socrates, and you don’t have to deliver a prescribed syllabus.

The few teachers who had inspired me during my own formal learning were the ones who tried to engage the class with their presence. They used the content of the course as a means to an end, the end being the process. They solicited questions, and they invested themselves into the performance of teaching to try to spark something in us. They were storytellers, really, and they tried to use their stories to make the content mean something to the class.

I tried to emulate these teachers, but some subjects were more difficult to animate than others. Teaching, say, economics, as I did at GCSE ‘A’ level, the content seemed very abstract and you had to paint pictures for students to connect it with their experience. I developed some stand-up gags. For example, I’d walk into the classroom and throw some coins on the floor, declaring that modern money has no intrinsic value but is merely a *medium of exchange* (cue discussion about the idea of money). Inevitably, thanks to some light-fingered members of class, I would pick up slightly less change than I had dropped, thus disproving my own assertion, but this was good material for more comedy, and I was usually given the money back, eventually. With marketing, student engagement came ready-made, you didn’t have to create the connection. We see brands and advertisements all the time, and students know that somehow out of the nebulous but vaguely exciting idea of marketing emerges jobs and money, identities, homes and lifestyles, while places in the world bereft of marketing seem relentlessly grey, beaten down by poverty. Marketing is easy to get excited about - well, until you read about it in Kotler. His style might sell but it’s pedagogic bromide, riffing is much more fun. In a class, you could take a brand of chocolate snack someone was sneakily munching at the back and use it as a route into all sorts of interesting topics, like brand symbolism, advertising effects, obesity and health policy, gender representations and body image, consumer segmentation and demographics, consumer cultures and sub-cultures, family dynamics, aesthetics, income disparities, retail atmospherics, race and consumption, supply chains, sustainability and more. Students’ oven-ready engagement with marketing is a fertile source of material for classroom discussions, the spontaneous eruption of which, as any good teacher knows, means that we abandon ‘covering’ the prescribed curriculum to follow where the stories lead us. This can feel quite subversive, and there is something energising about that.

**Deeper into the Forest of (Mis)interpellation**

So, I was being hailed, along with my students, and my own half-formed ideas about what critical pedagogy meant couldn’t have been further from Marx. The Business Education I fell into was the tap-tap-screech of chalk on blackboards, teenagers shouting out rude jokes, Friday afternoon rain battering prefabricated mobile classrooms, ink-stained fingers from the hand-cranked carbon copying machine, paint-peeling corridors, and deadbeat lecturers driving rusty Ford Cortinas (my temperamental car, known as the ‘shed’ by my students).

Please Sir! reminiscence is all very well, though, but how relevant can it be for the elite business of university pedagogy? In many failed job interviews, I was told that marketing ed in universities was an intellectual ‘step-change’ in comparison to FE college teaching. Maybe, but I couldn’t see how the process of teaching the Concept, the Mix and so on was so very different, whether teaching 16 year-olds on remedial courses for failed school-leavers, or post-experience executives paying £60,000+ tuition fees for branded MBAs. Having done both, I still can’t. In spite of being knocked back at my Poly job interviews, I resolved to keep trying to educate myself alongside the FE day job, driven by my abiding curiosity about business, consumption and organisations, and people, but activated by my experience of teaching. I took distance learning and evening courses. Eventually, I managed to hitch a ride on the coattails of the post-binary divide, research-assessment-fuelled boom in university business education, and I finally left the college for the university sector, newly designated as such thanks to the Further and Higher Education Act of 1992. At first, I thought everything in universities seemed different, but also somehow the same. Education, with a capital E, that inspiring, enlightening catalyst for personal change, was still the espoused goal, but it seemed even more deeply buried under the weight of formal bureaucracy.

The UK was decades behind the USA in the adoption of BizMan Ed by universities, and the first UK University Marketing Departments (at Lancaster and Strathclyde) weren’t established until the 1960s. However, it wasn’t until the 1980s when Business Studies really caught the Zeitgeist. By then, I’d studied (well, passed exams in) Business Studies, firstly at a Technical College, and then at a Polytechnic. In my last year at the Poly, in 1985, there were 80 students in my cohort. Just a few years later there were more than 1000, with numbers rising so rapidly that the Poly, now re-designated a university, had to franchise the first year out to local colleges like mine. Even the elite universities were getting in on the act with these new-fangled business studies courses, most of them shamelessly filching their curricula from the ex-polys who had been first movers in importing BizMan education from the colonies to Blighty.

Adding to this heady, market-driven, mix, was the Research Assessment Exercise (the RAE, now re-packaged as the REF). Research assessment isn’t cool these days, but, for a while, it brought some meritocracy into the stuffy closed shop of academic research, and drove a huge expansion of academic journals, university departments, research topics, and optimism. If you could get some articles published in refereed journals, then the academic world was your oyster, as the newly minted business and management departments struggled to recruit enough staff to meet the surging student demand. It was a Klondike gold rush for academic late bloomers, corporate cast-offs, Marxist sociologists, not to mention late-blooming Marxist corporate cast-offs: there was no judgement, only redemption. I caught the mood of hope - if I could publish some stuff, I could realise my personal vision for a revised marketing pedagogy. If Kotler was bromide to marketing ed, I was going to be Viagra. I set to work trying to get my scribbling into print, gripped by the wholly irrational conviction that I had something to contribute. The Professor Welches of Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* were horrified that they might have to share the Senior Common Room with one of the new wave of pretenders professing in all manner of pseudo academic disciplines, like “Marketing,” but I felt that Marketing Educators could help to make university education better. For a short while, I had feature pieces making this point accepted in the *Timer Higher* (Hackley, 2004). After a while, my pitches stopped being accepted. Perhaps the old order at *THES* reasserted itself, as it did with the REF.

That was back in the early days of research assessment when universities had to pretend to take research-led teaching seriously. I bought into this ethos wholeheartedly. I was excited that, finally, unleashed from petty college strictures, I could teach my own ideas, instead of being charged with the exegesis of texts written by others. In universities, unlike colleges, they even let you write your own courses. Imagine that. It seemed to me that research was fundamental to critical pedagogy because without it, our courses would be merely parroting received wisdom from mass selling textbooks, doing education that was Further, not Higher, and uncritical, instead of critical. Or at least, such was my naïve view on the matter. Research and scholarship, to me, seemed fundamental to critical pedagogy. What was more, the kind of research that was beginning to appear in marketing journals was inspiring. The critical management studies (CMS) movement was well-established as a minority pursuit in UK universities by then, and it seemed excitingly subversive. Later, marketing had its own version with Dougie Brownlie et al’s. (1999) *Re-Thinking Marketing*, while Stephen Brown (1993, 1995) created a new critical genre entirely, peppered with commercial insights and gags, and stylistically anarchic compared to the typically turgid scholarly fare of business and management writing. What could be more critical and subversive in BizMan studies than writing about it with insight, verve and humour?

As for the role of research, well, relevance is irrelevant: business doesn’t need us and couldn’t care less what we think. We’re teachers and scholars, not movers and shakers. Research is a performance that has served to legitimise the Business and Management academy since Frank Pierson’s book, *The Education of American Businessmen* (Pierson, 1959) referenced the accusation from the Ford and Carnegie Foundations that management education in the USA lacked intellectual rigour. Cue, lots of business research, and a hard science model served the political agenda. It followed that research was a source of legitimacy for the growing ranks of UK university BizMan teachers too, especially when the elite universities began to sniff around the BizMan honeypot. Business and Management research as a whole might be little more than a well-funded private conversation between academic in-groups, but, I thought, it had a value not only as an intellectual proving ground for the cognoscenti but as an aid to better teaching. Higher Ed is about constructing arguments- if academics can write research pieces that peers think are good, then we might claim some authority to make judgements about our students’ efforts at doing the same in their essays. At least, that was my simple-minded take on the BizMan research enterprise. Another way of putting it is, if academics can master the rhetorical game of research journal publication, then they are well placed to tutor their charges in the Sophistical art of management bullshit.

My idea of Business Education was that it ought to be, well, education, rather than training. I don’t mean by that that I mock students’ vocational aspirations and force them to read Guy Debord and J.G.Ballard instead of Marketing texts (I just mention that Debord and Ballard have some interesting ideas that are relevant to Marketing, as I do many other non-business texts). I felt that my job was to use students’ vocational aspirations and their personal experience of consumption as a point of departure to try to engage them in thinking beyond the instrumental. After all, a critical marketer is a better marketer. As Douglas Holt has shown (e.g. in Holt and Cameron, 2012), myth, symbolism and ideology may be parts of the conceptual vocabulary of Marketing critique, but they also offer a more penetrating basis for understanding Marketing practice than the naïve Marketing planning and control paradigm. Besides, social science ought to be an effort to move towards truer accounts of the world, and if one is to understand branding it is necessary to understand ideological forms of communication. This includes understanding Marketing itself as a form of cultural brand (O’Reilly, 2005), an intrinsic component of which is ongoing ideological critique (Marion, 2006).

In the college classroom, education only became Education when the teaching plan was subverted by somebody asking a question or making an observation that wasn’t in the book. In university teaching, the context is different, but the aspiration is the same, to subvert the official process and achieve a meaningful connection. Marketing, that most vanilla of university subject choices, seemed to me an unlikely yet promising vehicle for pedagogic *subversion*. In their famous book, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner (2009: first published, 1969) quote Ernest Hemingway on writing: “In order to be a great writer, a person must have a built-in, shockproof crap detector” (p.3). Postman and Weingartner argue that this ought also to be an axiom of school education. Marketing provides us with perfect material for a ‘isn’t that crap? What about this?’ pedagogic departure from the dreary round of SWOTS and Mixes, Product-Market expansion grids, AIDA (the acronym, not the opera), the Concept, and the rest of our canon of one-size-fits-all Marketing principles, theories and axioms. Phil Kotler’s extraordinarily successful text might be to BizMan books what Lee Child is to thriller writing: grown-up themes written for a reading age of nine and a half, but the pearls of wisdom contained therein are distinctly Chance the Gardener. Every tautology and truism in the official account of our field is an invitation to a lively, and irreverent class discussion. Marketing is pedagogic gold because the official version is so, well, crap.

**The Ideology Thing**

I think I get the ideology thing, after my fashion, but, perhaps because of my direction through life, I feel committed to an interpretive worldview in which the individual is the measure of the social, rather than the other way around. For example, I thought the global success of Philip Kotler’s textbook genre had to be explained to some degree by the ideological character of his rhetorical style, so I wrote about that (Hackley, 2003), hoping that I could promote a critical vocabulary. I thought it was especially important to debunk the preposterous claim some managerial Marketing texts make that they directly access the ‘real’ world of practice by avoiding theory. Besides, any education that aspires to be higher as opposed to being merely further ought to include some tuition in critique. I see no conflict in this with the ostensibly vocational aims of business education. Without critical thinking and analytical skills (in the vernacular, the skills of crap detection), how can Marketing professionals hope to glean insights into markets and consumers to design strategy, or distinguish between research insight and redundant information? Or evaluate the claims made by rival actors in a Marketing department? It seemed to me that there need be no agenda to a critical Marketing pedagogy other than a commitment to the integrity of the students’ Education.

The issue I have with the idea of resisting ideology in Marketing, what Gross and Laamanen (2021) might see as my internalisation of the values of that ideology, is that Marketing education has been the most liberating ideology I’ve encountered in my lifetime. I’ve seen it hail thousands of students who found a subject they could engage with, and through which they could negotiate a path through Further and Higher education and the world of life and work beyond. And it liberated me from a world of hourly paid manual work, and, after that, from the grind of Further Education teaching, all the way to the sunny uplands of the research university sector. Over the years, I’ve seen it do the same for hundreds of colleagues as we unfolded from nervous newbies in the lecturing game to vaunted members of an international elite of published, garlanded, titled and tenured university academicians. Well, sort of. Higher education might be a public good, but if it wasn’t for marketisation, the global boom in business and management education would never have happened, and a lot of us wouldn’t have our platforms to rail against the capitalist machine. Anti-capitalism and neoliberalism are terms that seem to mean an awful lot of different things to different people, but there’s a risk they could mean one thing to our students when they see them bandied about in their readings and lectures: that they’re getting their MacBusiness and Management Degree with a large side-order of humbug. Then again, ideology does have a way of having the last word. Our tyro capitalist students don’t need our advice about making money. They need to learn how to talk like people like us. Sun Tzu’s advice to his generals to know thy enemy, one of the go-to axioms of business strategy (the other one being ‘change is the only constant’) seems apt here. As Postman and Weingartner (1969) suggest, teaching is much less about the content of the curriculum than we like to think. Our students, like our children, don’t listen to what we say with words - they watch what we do with them. We are the modern Sophists, like it or not, and teaching critical theory is simply another register of rhetorical expertise that we can impart, to the benefit of our students.

There is something regrettable about the world-wide dominance of BizEd as the number 1 choice in the college and university curriculum. Thousands of students have been corralled into sensible, parent-pleasing business and management courses when they might have found other subjects more fulfilling, or more useful to their lives, and to society. But who can say what might have transpired had not managerialism become the principal ideological force of the 20th century (Enteman, 1993), paving the way for entire university-based economies and armies of earnest educators? We have all been swept up in the management revolution, willing conscripts in the global neoliberal BizMan project, if that is what it is. It is an industry in which we are far from being the only beneficiaries. Business Education has been a key driver of the massive increase in UK student participation in Higher Education from 15% of the 18-30 population, to over 50% (UK Government 2021). An awful lot of those students would never have made it to university were it not for Business Ed. Right-leaning British newspapers and politicians claim now that the expansion of the university sector was a terrible mistake, but I’m yet to meet a business graduate who had regrets about their own experience. BizMan has become a global brand and a major attraction to international students: university education is one of the UK’s biggest invisible exports. Business Education, and Marketing Education (and let’s face it, Business Education would lose half its appeal without Marketing Education, the other half being Accounting) have, in fact, been powerful vehicles for growth, jobs and social mobility over the last 35 years, allowing that one person’s social mobility is another person’s exclusion. Even the elite Western universities and their exclusively branded higher degrees have been magically opened to the academic proles of Business and Management, or at least to those willing to mortgage their family’s future to pay the fees.

We all know the world is careering towards catastrophic environmental destruction, it is rife with misogyny, inequality, economic injustice, and we see all this play out in Marketing, one way or another, just as we see it play out if we study any of the humanities or social sciences. Marketing teachers and students are no more culpable in the world’s chaos than sociologists or geographers. Marketing education’s liberatory force isn’t unleashed by laying guilt on our students, nor on ourselves. Marketing is part of a greater Educational undertaking through which students learn to see the world and develop their capacity to form judgements about it. That is, provided it is critical, and not crap. What they do with that education is a matter for the students. They might become professionally committed to brand activism, or their commitment might simply be to land the well-paid job, pay off their burdensome loans and make a better life for themselves and their families. And who can blame anyone for that.

To this end, we can embrace our humbuggery. Kotler’s well-intentioned and stunningly successful efforts did not only turn a neglected back-office business function into the jewel in the crown of the global empire of BizEd. It can be co-opted into our critical enterprise as the pantomime baddy. The managerial paradigm of Marketing, that crudely vocational, unreflexive, un-critical ideological vehicle that underpins and reconstitutes a neo-liberal social order (Eckhardt et al., 2019, Firat, 2013, Marion, 2006, cited in Gross and Laamanen, 2021) can serve, whisper it, as a useful straw man for us critical Marketing types. Are we business school toilers really perpetuating a vast hegemonic neo-liberal conspiracy, a “war…on the planet and its inhabitants” no less (Moratis & Melissen, 2021), the remedy for which lies in re-labelling our product and tweaking the ingredients (Parker, 2021)? Is a stance of self-critique merely a pedagogic conceit? People might be just a little bit more circumspect than we give them credit for about the morsels they’re fed from the bland BizEd smorgasboard. The untenable truth may be that the managerial paradigm, and the critical paradigm, in business and management studies, look pretty much alike to many of our students who see education as a game of guessing what your lecturer wants you to say.

**The (Mis)interpellated Marketing Pedagogue**

In the course of my working life, I’ve seen so many committed and passionate Marketing Educators who benefit, I think, from the intellectual space that the threadbare official accounts of the subject afford, by filling it with imaginative, and subversive, pedagogic projects. Other subjects seem to suffer closer content surveillance. Our subject isn’t policed as rigorously, because everyone thinks it’s just silly Business Studies anyway, so it doesn’t matter. We can focus on almost any topic we like in our teaching and research because Marketing is everything, and nothing. Or perhaps it’s just that we are the designated owners of the dominant ideology of our time and every other ideology is crushed into insignificance under its weight. Either way, I think those of us fortunate enough to teach in relatively liberal departments have a kind of freedom to be subversive that can be more fraught with professional risks in some other disciplines.

The kind of educational liberation I can connect with is a liberation of the mind and, through that, of the person. Besides, the idea of emancipation as social action that lies at the heart of the critical educational theory of Friere leads to a knotty problem that besets all brands of management educator, but Marketing specialists in particular - there is no room in Friere’s collectivist scheme for the market. This is awkward. We BizEd types might all be parasites feeding off the rotting corpse of capitalism, but we are also educators who have a remit, and an obligation, to critique, question and provoke, even if we appear ridiculous, or hypocritical in the process. Our field is packed with imaginative and talented scholars and educators who bring life and energy to this most unpromising of curricula offerings. Since the days of the old Marketing Education Group (MEG) conferences, I feel fortunate and privileged to have fallen into a community of good-humoured, and proudly (mis)interpellated Marketing teachers and scholars who care about the subject, and about their students, and who engage in conversations like the one to which this *JMM* special issue is devoted. The best antidote to the gullibility that besets the world in the face of a tide of ideology and propaganda in public discourse is a well-developed crap detector, and education, that is, Education, has a serious role to play in fostering the skills of crap detection. Critical Marketing Educators are in service to this noble cause.

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