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A Paradoxical Academic Identity: Fate, Utopia and Critical Hope.

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Abstract

Using a dialectical mode of exposition, I offer a reflexive sociological theorization of the paradox that characterises my academic identity: a fatalistic disenchantment concerning the colonization of Higher Education by neo-liberalism co-exists with a utopianism concerning Higher Education's emancipatory possibilities. I begin with a discussion of Weber's contention that disenchantment is the fate of bureaucratized modernity. This is followed by a consideration of Freire's conception of hope as a universal ontological need and Bloch's conceptualization of the objective and subjective dimensions of hope. The significance these authors attribute to dreaming in the development of the utopian imagination is also addressed. Next, I argue that the tensions in my identity, generated by the paradox of fatalism and utopianism, are partially resolved in the practice of a pedagogy of critical hope. I conclude by suggesting that this pedagogy can only be interstitial, existing within the gaps in bureaucratized, neo-liberal higher educational institutions.

Key Words: identity, fate, utopia, pedagogy, hope.

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Introduction: The dance of the dialectic

This paper attempts to think through a contradiction experienced by a progressive educator confronted by the fate of an increasingly neo-liberalized and bureaucratized Higher Education (henceforth HE) system. Working within an HE system driven by market forces rather than academic values has resulted in tensions within my academic identity. I use the locution academic identity to signify my publicly enacted professional self (White 2012). I experience this self as riven by a paradox: the oscillation between fatalistic disenchantment and utopian hope. I have attempted to resolve this paradox by developing a pedagogic praxis which, whilst acknowledging the constraints of the contemporary HE system, nevertheless preserves a commitment to and a faith in an emancipatory vision of its purpose. This paper is an attempt to explain these tensions in my professional identity.

I work within the English HE system that is increasingly driven by market forces inimical to my "transformative" educational ideology (Fanghanel 2012). This ideology can be summarized as envisioning HE as a vehicle for individual and social change, as a means of creating the conditions of possibility for a more socially just world. Such an ideological position is in contradiction with what I perceive to be the dominant ideology in HE - the "production ideology" which positions HE, first and foremost, as a means of enhancing employability (Fanghanel 2012). For me HE pedagogy is "a deeply civic, political and moral practice" (Giroux 2013: x). This has resulted in a chronic tension within my academic identity. In my day-to-day working life I experience my professional self as riven by a paradox: I oscillate between fatalistic disenchantment and utopian hope. I have attempted to resolve this paradox by developing a pedagogic praxis which, whilst acknowledging the constraints of the contemporary HE system, nevertheless preserves a commitment to and a faith in an emancipatory vision of its purpose.

What I offer here is a reflexive account of this paradox in which I move from sociological theory to my own lived experience. As Henkel (2010) states, reflexivity is crucial to understanding identity. Giddens(1991) defines reflexivity as the ability to revise ways of thinking and interacting in the light of new information and knowledge. My academic identity can be envisaged as the "reflexive interplay" (Henkel 2011:65) of my biographical, institutional, and disciplinary identities. I was a non-traditional, mature entrant to HE who, subsequent to completing a higher degree, chose to work in a small, provincial, teaching-led HE institution with a long history of widening participation. I am a sociologist with two decades experience of HE teaching but who now teaches on ostensibly interdisciplinary, vocationally oriented programmes resulting in academic identity becoming less specialized (Barrett 2012). I chose to become, first and foremost, a university teacher. Thus, although research is an important dimension of my academic identity, my teaching identity (Henkel 2000) is cardinal. This then constitutes the biographical point of departure for this theoretically driven analysis of the "project" (Giddens 1991) of my academic identity. My paper is an attempt to explain these tensions in my academic identity using the language and conceptual tools of my "epistemic community" (Henkel 2010:8), the discipline of sociology.

Just as I exhort my students to consider the importance of both the form and content of their academic writing, so too I have attempted to make the form of this paper congruent with its content. I have, therefore, opted for a dialectical method of exposition. This decision was taken in pursuit of clarity and elegance of explication. For as Singer (1983:77) observes, the dialectical method is not "something deep and mysterious", but is rather, as Hegel himself argued, "a method with a 'simple rhythm'; to dance to it takes no great skill."[1] The metaphor of the dance is both appropriate and useful as the dialectical method of exposition resonates with, and is capable of capturing something of the processual, dynamic nature of reality in general (Mepham & Ruben 1979) and my experience of academic identity in particular. The dialectical mode of understanding I develop uses a Weberian- Marxist framework (Merleau-Ponty 1955).

Part 1 Theory: Reflections on academic Identity

In this part of the paper I use concepts from the work of Weber, Freire and Bloch to reflect upon and articulate the paradoxical nature of my academic identity. I dialectically counter-pose the concepts of fate and utopia to capture and articulate the contradiction that characterizes my identity as a university teacher.

Thesis: Fate

Weber never explicitly defines the term fate. A concise sociological definition is however provided by Baumann. Whilst acknowledging that fate is, in part, the result of "human choices", Baumann (2012: 25) defines fate as firstly, "something we can do little about", and secondly, as "delineat(ing) the set of feasible options" that are available to us. Fate is "the un-chosen historical moment in which we have to act" (Bauman 2012:26). Thus, I can do little about the increasing "performativity" that characterizes my working life. Ball (2012: 19) defines performativity as a policy technology that "links effort, values, purposes and self –understanding to measures and comparisons of output." Hyper-rational institutional measures of accountability, such as the performance and development review and performance related pay, shape my institutional academic identity (Ball 2003, 2012). Weber would have recognized the technology of performativity, as its precursor lies in his signature concept of rationalization.

As Weber observed: "The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization intellectualization and, above all, by a 'disenchantment of the world'" (Gerth & Mills 1948:155). For Weber, life in modernity is characterized by a particular blend of capitalism, technology and bureaucracy which work together to dehumanize and

[1] The dance metaphor underpins not only the dialectical method but also my approach to academic argument. See also Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 5-6):
"Try to imagine a culture where arguments are not viewed in terms of war, where no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing ground. Imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are seen as performers, and the goal is to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently."

subjugate humanity. Humans, he argues, are fated to become disenchanted with their life worlds because of the irresistible instrumental logic of modernity. This logic consists of an increasing rationalization of both thought and action which leads to a disenchantment with world: a state of mind and a way of living devoid of passion and creativity. By rationalization Weber means the process through which the world becomes mastered by technical means and calculation. Unlike the people of the pre-modern and early modern world, modern people no longer interpret the world as being subject to the whims of gods and demons which demand propitiation through magical means. People have become disenchanted with a world in which there are no longer any "mysterious or incalculable forces" (Gerth & Mills 1948:139). Our fate is now determined by "impersonal forces" (Gerth & Mills 1948:148) such as the burgeoning power of bureaucracy.

Bureaucracy can be defined as the most technically superior and efficient form of administration which is founded upon scientific knowledge (Schroeder 1995:234). Bureaucracies are institutions with a strict hierarchy of command and specialization of tasks. Bureaucratic authority consists in the domination of people through knowledge, specialist expertise and impersonal rules. Bureaucracies, Weber argued, revolutionized administration in an analogous way to the way machines revolutionized industry (Gerth & Mills 1948). Weber links the expansion of bureaucratic power with the expansion of capitalism: "Today it is primarily the capitalist market economy which demands that the official business of the administration be discharged precisely, unambiguously, and with as much speed as possible" (Gerth & Mills 1948:215). Administration operates "without regard for persons" and serves only "naked economic interests" (Gerth & Mills 1948:215). This leads to de-humanization: the personal dimensions that escape calculation are banished. Increasingly, the fate of humanity is to be incarcerated within an "iron cage" of capitalist bureaucratic institutions (Gerth & Mills 1948) and the compulsion to pursue material goods and wealth (Weber 1930).

At this point it is important to make the distinction between Weberian bureaucratic administration and neo-liberal managerialism. As Henkel's (2011) historical genealogy clearly shows, in the late twentieth century the change from welfare capitalism to neoliberalism had a fundamental impact on academic identities in the UK. There was a shift from university work being funded by the state and steered by state bureaucracies, of the type analysed by Weber, to university work being defined and steered by market forces. The global triumph of neo-liberal ideology has re-positioned both the state and the university[2]. The role of the state is no longer to finance universities but to extend and support market forces (Henkel 2011). Universities have become corporate enterprises. However, rather than reducing bureaucracy, the "corporate university" (Roggero 2011: 63) has given birth to a new form of bureaucracy staffed by powerful professional academic administrators and managers and driven by market economics rather than the unfettered pursuit of knowledge. The effect of this market driven rationalization on academic identity is, as Weber would have predicted, disenchantment**.**

[2] But as Ball (2003: 217) argues, the state has not relinquished control, rather it exercises new form of "less visible regulation, a more 'hands off', self- regulating regulation."

Weber's fatalistic thesis concerning the inevitability of disenchantment resonates with my experience of the extension of the market economy into HE in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The rationalization of neoliberal HE has engendered in me disenchantment as I feel increasingly imprisoned in the iron cage of a managed academic identity (White 2012). The consequence of the excessively pragmatic orientation of managerialism results in far too much academic labour being devoted to routine administrative tasks. For example, producing standardized module and programme reports; completing student monitoring documentation, and standardizing module information uploaded onto the virtual learning environment. Furthermore, in curriculum design and development, for example, the inherent economic rationlization of neo-liberal HE causes pedagogical concerns with coherence and academic standards to be subordinated to short term administrative and commercial concerns about marketability. The university now appears more concerned with branding and marketing its educational commodities rather than rigourous academic enquiry. The potential creativity of learning and teaching is thereby vitiated and knowledge becomes transmogrified into a mechanically produced commodity prescribed not only by module descriptors, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, but by, the cost-benefit calculus and the profit motive. As a result the university becomes a knowledge factory and learning and teaching becomes an increasingly dehumanized process.

Freire (1998:102) calls this de-humanization the "bureaucratization of the mind" and argues that there has been "a 'mass production' of the individual". This results in "conformity in the face of situations considered to be irreversible because of destiny" (Freire 1998:102). Often, in the numerous meetings that I attend, I have compromised my academic integrity as a progressive educator by a fatalistic conformity to bureaucratic directives, by a resigned acceptance of yet more performativity. Often, I have colluded in the mass production of students through delivering standardised modules and acceded to the "dulling down" (Ainley & Canaan 2005:436) of module content and assessment, through my refusal to "dare to look beyond the horizon of the given" (Giroux 2003:98). Often, I have judged my colleagues performance through institutional "fabrications" (Ball 2003) valuing them solely for their productivity. Often, I have simply accepted the fatefulness of neoliberalism and managerialism.

Freire (1998: 93), like Weber, sees fatalism as the product of both bureaucracy and capitalism, and refers to "the fatalistic philosophy of neo-liberal politics". Furthermore, he conceives neo-liberalism to be a form of "necrophilly"[3] that kills hope and destroys humanity's potential to dream. Freire's work however offers a challenge to the Weberian fatalism. Education offers us utopian possibilities. It can unveil opportunities for individual and social change. Humans are unfinished, in a process of becoming so our fate is not completely determined. Within my academic identity weary fatefulness can be conceptualized as existing in a dialectical tension with an emancipatory utopianism.

[3] Freire has taken the concept of necrophily from the work of Marxist psychoanalytic thinker Eric Fromm. Fromm (1964:41) argues: "The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things. All living processes, feelings, and thoughts are turned into things." Nechrophily is the product of consumer capitalism and bureaucracy.

Antithesis: Utopia

A belief central to my individual and disciplinary academic identity is the power of education to enable individual and social transformation (Giroux 2003). This was the driving force behind becoming a university educator. My life has, and continues to be transformed by HE and I am committed to preserving that possibility for others. The work of Bloch and Freire has helped me to conceptualize the role and importance of the utopian imaginary in my academic identity.

As Giroux and McLaren (1997) argue, Freire's concept of utopia and Bloch's philosophy of utopia share striking similarities. Firstly, they share a rigorously Marxist dialectical approach; secondly, they share an open ended philosophical anthropology concerning the unfinished nature of human beings; thirdly, they both believe in the revolutionary potential of dreaming; and finally, they share a belief that hope is a universal human ontological need. These similarities warrant closer inspection.

Both Freire and Bloch seek to understand the possibility of utopia through deploying a dialectical approach. For Freire the realization of utopia demands that people become fully human. This can only happen through praxis: a dialectical process of critical refection and action. Freire's conceptualizes critical reflection through his signature concept of conscientization. Conscientization signifies consciousness raising: the educative process of encouraging the movement from naive to critical consciousness. As Cruz's (2013) exploration of the concept of conscientization suggests, the contemporary relevance of this concept is clear. It can enable my students to obtain a clearer understanding of the way neo-liberalism has shaped both their lives and their education.

The philosophical anthropology that characterizes both the work of Bloch and Freire is that being human is a process rather than a state: humans are incomplete beings, are in a process of becoming. For both writers, to become more fully human is our ontological and historical vocation. Freire and Bloch endorse the famous observation by Marx (1926) that people make history but not under circumstances of their own choosing. Both then emphasize the dialectic of determination and freedom, how social structures and material realities enable and constrain individual and social agency. The freedom to choose therefore is always bounded by particular un-chosen social-historical limitations.

Freire also draws a useful distinction between determined and conditioned existence. Because humans are unfinished, in a process of becoming, they are not determined. Thus, although students are conditioned by factors such as class, gender and ethnicity, they have the potential to become conscious of that conditioning through education (conscientization) and to move beyond it. People are both subject to and the maker of history: "we have an ontological vocation to intervene in the world" (Freire 1972: 55). It is our awareness of our unfinished condition that stimulates such intervention in the world. It is the ontological state of being unfinished that makes humans educable.

In sum, Freire articulates both an ontology and epistemology of openness and unfinishedness. Similarly, Bloch (1986) articulates a conception of the unfinished nature of human beings through the concept of “Not-Yet-Being”.

What did Bloch mean by this expression? Both material reality and human beings are in a perpetual process of becoming. The world and all it contains is incomplete. It awaits completion through human action. Both the world and human beings are “Not-Yet”, unfinished. Life is characterized by the possibility of being other than it is. There is no pre-determined trajectory for humans, there is no teleology in history. Rather, present reality is conditioned by the past and shapes the options available in the present. The present therefore is latent with possible futures, futures which we can as yet only dream of. Subjective human hopes for a better world interact dialectically with objective tendencies in social, economic and political life. The initial impulse for this dialectic is human need, initially for food shelter and clothing and subsequently a need for self-fulfillment. The world is in process, an open and dynamic reality in which new ways of being are always possible. The “Not-Yet-Being” therefore signifies the possibility of humans recreating themselves anew. Throughout his work Bloch endeavoured to capture the “paradoxical nature” (Goeghegan 1996:36) of the emergence of the new, its absent-presence within the now. This absent presence is perhaps most clearly indicated in dreams we have of a better world.

At the heart of Bloch’s utopian theory, Geoghegan (1996:40) argues, is “the existence of utopian dreams”. Indeed, utopianism emerges from the human “capacity for, and need of, dreaming” (Geoghegan 1996:145). The classification and analysis of utopian dreams therefore, forms the theoretical core of Bloch’s monumental work *The Principle of Hope*. For Bloch dreaming is a vital way of moving beyond the limitations of the present and anticipating a better world to come (Levitas (1997). For me this means opening up possibilities for students to think beyond the confines of their present reality, opening up the possibility, for example, that the purpose of education is the cultivation of critical global citizens capable of making informed judgments concerning their lives, rather than simply the production of employment ready graduates. For Feire too dreaming is a central dimension of revolutionizing the world. He states: “Dreaming is not only a necessary political act it is an integral part of the historic-social manner of being a person. Dreaming is part of human nature, which within history, is in permanent process of becoming” (Freire 1994:90-91).Dreaming of a better future, I suggest to my students, is the positive dialectical moment, the counterpart of the negative critique of denouncing present inequalities and iniquities. I view encouraging students to dream as an important dimension of problem based learning. For example, after exploring the political economy of human waste disposal in the majority world, I encouraging students to use a Freirian model of health education to dream of innovative solutions to the problem of disease caused by poor sanitation.

For both Feire and Bloch then dreams are a central dimension of the utopian imaginary. Indeed, it is not possible to understand or struggle to improve social life without dreams and the hope they embody. Dreams depend upon hopes of a better world. From where does such hope emerge? Freire (1972) argues that hope emerges from the human

condition of being incomplete or unfinished: human being is in a perpetual state of becoming. Hope therefore is an "ontological need" (Freire 1994:8). Freire (1994:8) sums up his position in this way: "We need critical hope like a fish needs unpolluted water." Although Bloch does not use the term critical hope, he uses an equivalent concept that of "educated hope". This is a form of hope which is keenly aware of how real, material conditions both enable and constrain the possibilities for social action. As Levitas (1997) observes, educated hope is a dialectical process which combines reason and passion: a reasoned analysis of prevailing conditions with a passionate desire for change. It combines an "anticipatory consciousness" with a "Being-in-possibility" consciousness (Bloch 1986: 209).

The concept of hope I am deploying combines rationality (though not instrumental rationalization) and passion, determinism and freedom in a dialectical synthesis. This synthetic transcendence, however, must take place not simply in abstraction, in the realm of thought, but in the realm of pedagogic praxis where theory and practice are conjoined.

Part 2 Practice: Academic Identity in Action

In the *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx (in Bottomore and Rubel 1961:84) states:

> All social life is essentially *practical*. All the mysteries which lead theory towards mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.

I will now explore the way the tension between fatalism and utopianism in my academic identity is partially resolved in action: through understanding my teaching and research activities as endeavouring to enact a pedagogy of critical hope.

Synthesis : A Pedagogy of Critical Hope

A pedagogy of critical hope as has been described as an approach to teaching and learning which is dialogic, situational and transformative (Canaan 2005 and Ainley, Canaan 2005). It is a pedagogy which positions learners as "active social agents from particular social groupings" (Canaan 2005:6). Acknowledging that students are from specific socio-economic, ethnic, gender etc., groups results in the need to make careful pedagogic choices concerning the coding and presentation of knowledge so that it is accessible and inclusive without being dulled down. For example, presenting Foucaultian theory as a set of conceptual thinking tools which can be used to reframe their mundane experience of examinations as disciplinary techniques that shape their identities, demythologizes theory and re-positions the everyday as valid data for analysis and opens a way into the rarefied domain of theorizing for students who often find that domain inaccessible.

I have found the work of Halpin to be a valuable resource for re-conceptualizing teaching and learning in pedagogy of critical hope. As he argues, “Teaching is premised on hope – that is, on the possibility that it will realize improvement of one kind or another” (Halpin 2003: 30). Teaching entails working with what is present in learners in the hope that some change, some improvement in knowledge and understanding may be realized. Halpin (2003:14) defines hope as “a way of living prospectively in and engaging purposefully with the past and present.” Thus we must work with student consumerism and instrumentalism and the strategic learning practices this creates in order to engender a less alienated (Mann 2001) approach to learning. In my experience framing engaged learning as an effective means to the end of obtaining a higher grade has created possibilities for learning to become an end in itself not simply a means to an end.

Within a pedagogy of critical hope assessment is also reframed in a way that balances the need to equip specific groups of students with the meta-cognitive knowledge, strategies and abilities they need (Luke & Hardy 1999) without thereby increasing student instrumentality. I have found that building in assignment guidance sessions into the curriculum gives students opportunities to explore and use learning outcomes, assessment criteria and grade descriptors makes the assessment process more transparent and less alienating. Rather than teaching *to* the test, this is teaching *for* the test. It is an acknowledgement of the centrality of assessment in the student imaginary which simultaneously attempts to engages students in the process not simply with the product of learning.

As Ainley and Canaan (2005) argue, a pedagogy of critical hope also attempts to avoid the conflation of learning with assessment. Assessments must be more than a means to the end of a grade. Assessments must be designed *for* learning rather than simply being a test *of* learning. A pedagogy of critical hope then, in my view, involves a degree of pedagogical sleight of hand, a degree of dissimulation. For example, enhancing consumer choice, for example, in the design of assessments, can entice students to become more engaged with the curriculum. This opens up the possibility of “the student as producer”, of students becoming active producers rather than passive reproducers (Neary & Winn 2009). In my experience this has resulted in the assessment process and product become less alienating and commodified, and has gone some way to reduce grade fetishism. Much also depends, however, on who controls assessment, not only its design and execution, but the ways in which resulting grades are managed, often by bureaucratic exam boards.

Being hopeful though, is not without its dangers (Halpin 2003). It entails critical reflection on current realities. This creates discontent with the present and the desire for change. Such discontent has to be carefully managed, but it can encourage both student and teacher to dream of utopian futures. Such utopianism is capable of transforming the disabling paralysis of despair and disenchantment into discontent which is a catalyst for individual and social change. A pedagogy of critical hope then can enable both students and teachers “to live without certainty and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation” (Halpin 2003:6). And, I would add, it can enable us to endure

the vicissitudes and disappointments that slight hope with courage, tenacity and patience. For me, courage, tenacity and patience are not only key graduate qualities which are required for life in an uncertain and rapidly changing globalized world they are also key human qualities.

A pedagogy of critical hope then can be conceptualized as the dialectical synthesis which results from practicing a pedagogy *in* and *for* itself (Sutton 2011). Here I use a distinction made by Marx (in Bottomore and Rubel 1963) concerning the proletariat's struggle to resist the domination of the bourgeoisie. Progress towards a just and emancipated society, Marx argued, required radical socio-economic change. Such change required the proletariat to unite and become both a class '*in*' and '*for*' itself. Class *'in'* itself is the ascribed, objective dimension of class resulting from the proletariat's position in the mode of production. Whether the proletariat realizes it or not, it is the subjugated, exploited class. Similarly, a pedagogy *in* itself, is the product of the objective position of the proletarianised academic within the neo-liberal mode of knowledge production. Just as the industrial proletariat unwittingly reproduced its subjugated position when it remained simply a class '*in*' itself, so too the academic proletariat, working in today's knowledge factories, by enacting a pedagogy *in* itself reproduce the exploitative relations of neo-liberalism. Such an un-reflexive pedagogy institutes forms of learning and teaching that preclude both teachers and learners from realizing the conservative and reproductive functions of HE.

Class '*for*' itself is the achieved subjective dimension of class. It occurs when the proletariat becomes collectively conscious of the appropriation of its' labour power by the bourgeoisie, that is, their exploitation. Only when the proletariat becomes a class '*in and for'* itself can it transform capitalism. A pedagogy *for* itself is a pedagogy committed to unveiling possibilities for individual and social transformation. It opens up new ways of being, knowing and doing Barnett & Coate (2005). However, given the institutional context in which learning and teaching takes place, the transformative possibilities of a pedagogy *in* and *for* itself are limited. In my own research I have found that such possibilities tend to be interstitial, local, and are mediated by the quality of the human relationships which exist between learner and teacher (Sutton and Gill 2010).

It is then in face-to-face encounters with students that a pedagogy of critical hope is enacted. Indeed, on the days when I choreograph the dance of the dialectic satisfactorily, the disenchanted fatalism of a pedagogy *in* itself combines with the utopianism of a pedagogy *for* itself and produces a temporary resolution of the paradoxical tension in my academic identity. On other days, the demands of institutional performativity and relentless student instrumentalism combine to make this temporary resolution impossible. The dance of the dialectic never ceases, and as Land (2008:144) astutely comments, "The ideal of unity and completeness is illusory. We have to settle for paradox."

Conclusion: Hope in the small spaces of praxis

Using a dialectical method of exposition I have used sociological theory to explore the fatalism and utopianism which constitute the paradox of my academic identity. Firstly,

using the work of Weber on rationalisation and disenchantment, I argued that the creativity of an emancipatory HE has been vitiated by the instrumental logic of neo-liberalism and bureaucracy. The possibility of a critical humanistic education for individual and social transformation has been transmogrified by bureaucratization, marketization and commodification.

Secondly, using aspects of the work of Freire and Bloch, I explored the utopian dimension of my identity. Their powerful arguments concerning the unfinished nature of human being and the importance of dreaming and hope explicates and sustains the utopian impulse in my emancipatory vision of the purpose of HE. Thirdly, I argued that the dialectical relationship of fate and utopia are temporarily synthesized in praxis in a pedagogy of critical hope. This praxis is, however, only interstitial and the paradox of identity can only ever be temporarily resolved.

The conclusion that it is only at the micro level that the neo-liberal production ideology can be challenged may initially appear dispiriting. But, as Merleau-Ponty (1955:23) argues, “there is no situation without hope”. Within HE institutions there remains space, albeit limited, to develop more progressive transformative pedagogies. Despite the intensification of the management of academic identity and the demands of performativity, such governance is incomplete. For example, although learning and teaching are governed at the macro systemic level by neo-liberal economic imperatives and QAA subject benchmarks, etc.; and at the meso or institutional level by learning and teaching policies, validation procedures etc.; the prescription of what is actually taught and how it is taught at modular level is incomplete. This constitutes a gap where more progressive pedagogical praxis can be created.

So progressive educators must not only mind the gap, they must also find the gap. For in different HE institutions, and in different disciplinary and inter-disciplinary programs, the location and nature of the gap will differ. Certainly, the institutional interstices tend to occur at the face-to-face level of lectures and seminars, in the dialogical human relationships and interactions of learning and teaching. For it is here that a pedagogy *in* and *for* itself, a pedagogy of critical hope emerges. However, each HE practitioner must discover for themselves the small spaces of praxis wherein the possibility of more creative learning and teaching reside; the small spaces in which human knowing, being and doing are transformed.

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