Identity Work and Pedagogy: Revisiting George Herbert Mead as a Vehicle for Critical Management Education and Learning

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ABSTRACT

Although identity has become an excessive preoccupation of people in everyday life, its centrality to critical management learning and education has sometimes been ignored. In this essay, we explore the strengths and limitations but also the neglect of Mead's analysis of self and identity for developing a pedagogy that facilitates critical management learning. Through a sociology of knowledge, we trace this neglect to earlier research where, with limited exceptions, Marxian inspired critical research tended to eschew a concern with processes of the self-formation of subjects. We argue that Mead's ideas on reflexivity and indeterminacy are central to learning to think differently, which is the benchmark for teaching from a critical management perspective. Drawing on Foucault, we theorise identity work in the context of power/knowledge relations in ways that help us to transform our pedagogy. Overall, we seek to challenge not only our students but also ourselves in reflecting on identity work to facilitate ways of thinking and feeling differently in teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Through drawing on the comparatively neglected work of George Herbert Mead (1900; 1910; 1934), this essay is concerned with how *reflexive* social interaction or what is now often called identity work (Brown, 2015) is of major significance in processes of learning and teaching (e.g., Moore & Koning, 2016; Petriglieri & Petriglieri, 2010). We argue that interacting with the perspectives of others impacts how we conceive of (management) learning as a discipline and practice (McDonald, 2016: 397; Tienari, 2019). Our focus is on critical management learning and education (CMLE) where we think that its potential to enable us to *think differently* (Tomkins & Ulus, 2015) can be enhanced by engaging with Mead's ideas.

There is no shortage of discussions of critical reflexivity in management education (Vince, 2002; Reynolds & Vince, 2004; Tomkins & Ulus, 2015), and these establish a valuable framework for any analysis in this field. So, for example, distinctions are made between critical thinking as that which would be expected in any academic study and critical in the sense of reflecting critically upon, and challenging, the status quo of prevailing social and institutional arrangements. The former involves cognitive problem-solving whereas the latter is more value-driven and challenges political regimes that fail to meet certain ideals (Reynolds, 1998: 183).

Within management education, this distinction is illuminating in identifying critical thinking that reflects on the problems of a technical, or what might now be called managerial, nature concerned only with the *means* to the *end* of efficiency, profit, growth or productivity by contrast to critical reflexivity of the ends themselves and the moral values that underpin them. However, at another level, this replication of the Weberian fact-value distinction can be misleading since means and ends or facts and values are ultimately difficult to prise apart for, they are mutually entangled and inform one another. This is a weakness in Schön's (1995)

theory of reflective practice though he 'was surely correct in his identification of the insufficiency of technical rationality as an epistemology of practice' (Perriton, 2015: 28). While we agree that more analysis is required to explore critical reflexivity and its relevance for practice (Dewey, 1997a; Vince, 2002; Reynolds and Vince, 2004), one of the most important issues is how to develop a pedagogy that overcomes the indifference or resistance of many students to management learning that involves thinking and feeling differently, both about themselves and the topic of their studies (Reynolds & Vince, 2004; Tomkins & Ulus, 2015). These authors have inspired us to pursue this exploration of pedagogy and critical management learning.

The classroom is a knotty and plurivocal space in which one's identity and narratives are subjected to the gestures of others and one's embodied ideas and practices are disciplined by 'the situation you are dealing with' (Horton, 1990: 45). These struggles and tensions constitute a teacher's sense of who they are and what they do in response to 'ideas and practices that threaten their own comfortable sense of identity' (Brookfield, 2013: ix). Our essay seeks to illustrate how this tension is an 'essential condition' for learning (Mead, 1934: 134) because how we engage with others in our pedagogic practices is framed partly by underlying processes of identity work. As a basis for understanding these struggles and tensions, we have traced contemporary critical management studies (CMS) and critical management education and learning (CMEL) back to its early genesis in the 1980s.

Inspiration for our analysis is Foucault's concern to think the unthought: 'I only write because I do not yet know exactly what to think of this thing that I would like to think so much. [...] I am an experimenter in the sense that I write to change myself and not think the same thing as before' (1994: 1). This indeterminacy is also fundamental to Mead who argues

that freedom is possible because individuals' responses are conditioned, but not determined by the situation in which they act (1934: 210-211). Confronting this indeterminacy necessarily is disruptive of the complacency of settled identities and therefore a vehicle for learning to think differently.

The essay is organized through three sections. First, we examine the neglect of Mead in CMEL, concluding that this could have been a result of failing to understand his importance to the earlier research of those that provided the stimulus for CMS. In the second section, we turn to a sociology of knowledge of the genesis of CMS and its relevance to CMEL to consider how (and why) Mead was largely neglected in subsequent accounts of identity and more recently, identity work. While Mead and his reflexive recognition of indeterminacy are important to any analysis of the self-formation process, this is often neglected in contemporary studies of identity work (c.f. Knights & Clarke, 2017). Although a necessary condition of learning to think and feel differently, in the third and final section, we explore how this indeterminacy can result in even deeper attachments to identity that obstruct the development of critical pedagogy in management education and learning. In a brief concluding section, we summarize our argument to reinforce the importance of Mead in encouraging a pragmatic yet reflexive pedagogy that does not only acknowledge but also embraces an indeterminacy of the self, social relations and teaching.

CRITICAL MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

In this section, we uncover why Mead (1934) has been largely effaced by CMS and CMEL theory even though his ideas are central to critical accounts of identity work. This is so even though his conception of self-formation is integral to several disciplines and theoretical perspectives that frame CMS and CME. By re-acquainting ourselves with Mead and

challenging the tendency for much research to take identity for granted rather than question its foundations, we hope to push studies on identity (concerning learning and organizing) in new directions (Adler, 2009; Cummings, Bridgman, Hassard & Rowlinson, 2017).

Mead makes clear that 'the self is not an object that has inherent meaning' (Fine, 1993: 78) for it arises from one's interactions with and is constitutive of our social relationships, thus crucial to theories of education (Garrison, 1998), and learning (French & Grey, 1996). Mead helps us understand how discursive practices provide a foundation for learning through our interactions with others. However, insofar as discourse may reflect and reproduce a solidification of the self, we deliberate on how identity work might obstruct processes of learning to think differently.

Some (e.g., Perriton & Reynolds, 2018) have traced the development of CME as deriving from Alvesson & Willmott's (1992: 1) argument that we should challenge 'the neutrality or virtue of management as self-evident or un-problematical'. However, it can be argued that this development took place earlier through Clegg and Dunkerley's (1980) engagement with Gramsci (1971) and their assertion that the business school is a site of indoctrination for the 'reproduction of the contemporary dominant ideology of late capitalism' (Clegg, 1981: 558). It was argued that students are conscripted into the belief that they, as managers, will enjoy 'discretion or the least specificity of role prescription' while simultaneously building 'rules and rationality… into them' (ibid: 558). This value-driven criticism is the hallmark of critical approaches to teaching, as reflected in, for example, calls to reflexively challenge power differentials between teachers and students (Cunliffe & Sadler-Smith, 2015) through critical action learning (Willmott 1994; Cotton, 2020). As a result, critical forms of learning are now widely published in textbooks (e.g., Fulop & Linstead, 1999; Knights

and Willmott, 2017) and through journals such as Management Learning, the Journal of Management Education and the Academy of Management Learning and Education in ways that are beginning to impact the theory and practice of Higher Education.

As Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2010: 51) note, a complimentary and 'burgeoning body of research has begun highlighting the link and overlap' between 'the production, transfer, and practical utility' of CMEL and 'processes of identity work'. Research has demonstrated the 'emotional' (Sturdy, Brocklehurst, Winstanley & Littlejohns, 2006), 'anxiety-provoking' (Brown & Starkey, 2000) and 'problematic' (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006) character of learning. Although this work is highly illuminating of the processes of management learning, much of it seems not to consider the relevance of Mead's analysis of the self-formation process concerning identity. Yet learning is a social experience 'rather than individual, *just as the nature of our experience, as individuals, is social*' (Perriton & Reynolds, 2018: 65, our emphasis). We ask, then, why has Mead largely been neglected by CMS concerning identity work, including the flourishing literature on CMEL theory and practice?

There are some possible reasons for the exclusion of Mead from the CMS and CMEL literature on identity work. Though Mead rejected positivism, he did not 'move towards' critiquing the power relations, norms and cultures in which self-formation is embedded partly because this was not the focus of his disciplinary background in social psychology. Mead was principally interested in social interactions in the development of the self rather than 'practical accomplishments by members of society' (Psathas, 2014: 24). By contrast, 'CMS is a political project in the sense that it aims to unmask the power relations around which social and organizational life are woven' (Fournier & Grey, 2000: 13). It challenges cultures, ideologies,

institutions, politics and identities that dominate, damage or destroy people's meaningful experiences of work (Alvesson, 2008).

Because Mead did not focus or publish much on 'organization' per se, we are required to investigate and elucidate the political dimensions of his thought (Psathas, 2014: 25). This is important for several reasons, as we discuss in the sections that follow. Here, we focus briefly on two: (1) how Mead and symbolic interaction in general, advances an 'idealistic vision of democracy' that largely neglects relations of power within which actions are historically situated (Dunn, 1997: 703); and (2) how Mead's ideas were co-opted and 'stifled as a 'progressive' perspective through the absorption of pragmatism by logical positivism' (Adler et al., 2007: 23). Mills (1966), for example, suggested that 'bourgeois' pragmatists, including Mead, wished for social and political reform without providing any theoretical grounding for its legitimacy (cf. Carreira Da Silva, 2007). Subsequently, American pragmatism was (unfairly) tarnished by its association with a 'largely positivist' US academia characterised by a 'deep antipathy towards critical/radical ideas' (Prasad et al., 2015: 17).

That said, contemporary symbolic interactionism blends elements of American pragmatism with the 'continental theory' of Derrida, Freud and Wittgenstein, among others (see Goodman 1995). A range of critical academics (e.g., Habermas, 1984; Weick, 1995) have claimed Mead as significant as also have CMS theorists (Knights & Willmott, 1990, 1999; Alvesson & Willmott, 1992). Indeed, this cross-pollination, in which Mead is often evident if only implicitly, is also present in the foundational texts on identity work. For example, Snow and Anderson conceive identity work as the tension between one's idealized self-conceptions and the imputed social identities given by others - referred to as a 'kind of working compromise' (1987: 1348). Within CMS, Watson added analytical purchase by conceiving

identity work as the tension between the self and 'external discursive social-identities' (2008: 1350). The former draw on the work of Goffman (e.g., 1961) and the latter on Mills' 'sociological imagination' (1959), but Mead is neglected in name, if not necessarily in substance. In these two examples, there is a danger of adhering to a false binary between personal and social identity that can lead to essentialist arguments about the 'real' self as opposed to the so-called compromised identity necessitated by social life, something we return to in our concluding remarks. By contrast, our arguments are based on the idea that individuals are already social in advance of their identity work in a way parallel to how ethics can be regarded as prior to ontology because it involves precognitive, embodied sensibility in our face-to-face relations with the Other (Levinas, 1989).

To develop our arguments, we turn to the foundations of CMS to construct Mead's place within the 'sociology of knowledge', defined here as tracing concepts through their intellectual history. Mapping the sociology of knowledge within CMS can be approached by 'attempting to elucidate common threads or themes that run through work that is widely regarded as most central to or exemplary of CMS' (Grey & Willmott, 2005: 5). We aim to inspire others to challenge, problematize and debate identity work in relation to practising CMLE. For this reason, we try limitedly to incorporate contributions from overlapping fields, including critical human resource development, critical adult education, and/or management knowledge more generally. We anticipate that ongoing conversations and debates will arouse or reveal voices and perspectives that we may have inadvertently silenced.

SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

CMS has been considered a 'loose community of Marxist and neo-Marxist' scholars concerned with antagonisms between workers, organization and the wider economy (Wray-

Bliss, 2005: 409) with its genesis in labour process theory (Braverman, 1974) and its aftermath in a broader Foucauldian and interactionist approach (Knights & Willmott, 1989; 1999). Insofar as identity was a consideration in embryonic CMS, it was understood as conditioned by, or an escape from, relations of power (Knights & Roberts, 1982). Later, through engaging with Foucault, subjectivity was seen to be constituted by power often resulting in subjugation but never, except in situations of domination, precluding positive, productive and transformative social and organizational relations (Knights & Willmott, 1985; 1989; 1999)[i]People may reflexively 'germinate more liberating practices' (Fenwick, 2005: 32) by subjectively critiquing *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves' (Freire, 1970: 83 emphasis in original). Despite some authors claiming that Mead lacked an 'ethico-political dimension' (Alvesson & Willmott, 2003: 10), in his practice if not always in his theory, he was politically active in civic groups including, among others, movements seeking the liberation and promotion of women's rights (Aboulafia, 1993) and ontologically, at the core of his analysis, was an incalcitrant will to freedom (Jenkins, 2004). Had Mead considered the ramifications of this in more detail he might have re-focused more on how people consent, conform and comply to authority but sometimes resist by embracing 'alternate subject positions' … without necessarily risking … 'cultural displacement, alienation and disillusionment' (Fenwick, 2005: 34).

Although important to the initial phases of CMS, a departure from labour process theory was the impetus as theorists became more attracted to the poststructuralist and post-Marxian ideas of Foucault. A major concern was to theorize power more relationally (Knights & Vurdubakis, 1994), as productive and not just negative or coercive, but also constitutive of identity or subjectivity (Foucault, 1980; 1982). Although Mead was not a Marxist, his theory of the self contains elements of such discourse (Joas, 1985) for he did identify 'domination' in

the formation of identity and consciousness that emerges 'within the context of concrete social interactions' (Batiuk & Sacks, 1981: 211). By indicating how power relations often incorporate identity regulation that may constitute 'the mutual creation of… knowledge' through which people take subjective positions (ibid.: 219), Mead's analysis can be seen to have anticipated Foucault's much more developed understanding.

While certain traditional labour process theorists objected to the 'turn to language' and identity as revisionist in neglecting material oppressions (Thompson, 2004), important empirical studies of work and education could see the benefit of theorising the discursive production of meaning and identity in everyday working life (e.g., Willis, 1977). An analysis of subjectivity is then essential for comprehending the tensions between management, labour and the social production of value. It is important for 'an understanding of consent as much as resistance, gender and race as well as class, and market forces' that intersect with the formation of identities 'at the point of production' (Knights, 1990: 298). The work of (neo-Marxist) Gramsci (like Foucault) recognises that power is a pervasive, also often positive force, which enables people to assume and sustain certain identity positions 'rather than alternative ones' (Adler et al., 2007: 12). As Mead makes clear, we need to focus on how and why people pursue valued social identities that are, none-the-less, simultaneously made fragile by the unremitting practices and gestures of others. People engage in identity work by reflecting on such tensions, and in doing so, reflexively foster innovative practices and identities that have material as well as symbolic effects in the organization of, and learning about, life (Willis, 2003).

Although the focus on subjectivity has been primarily Foucauldian, critical theory is also a resource for many CMS theorists (Alvesson, 2003: 15) and it draws on Mead's theory of the self to construct a theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). However, apart from

the early work of Knights and Willmott (1989, 1999) and many of their colleagues (e.g., Brewis, Collinson, Grey, Kerfoot, McCabe, Morgan, O'Docherty, Sturdy, Vurdubakis and Wray-Bliss), Mead tended to be neglected except indirectly through the symbolic interactionism implicit in Habermas's work as also in the second generation of critical theorists (e.g., Honneth & Joas, 1988). Like Foucault, they reject the self-evident nature of reality and view subjectivity as constituted through various forms of socially disciplined knowledge.

In his analysis of communicative competence, Habermas explicitly builds on Mead's thesis (1934) on the intersubjective, social constitution of the self. For Habermas, subjectivity is grounded in historically mediated discursive practices that are dominated by (institutionalised) forms of instrumental rationality not limited to but reinforced by, capitalist and market relations (Visser, 2019). He contrasts instrumentalism with a view of rationality as 'intrinsically dialogical and communicative' that relies on a social theory of consciousness to conceive more democratic and ethically embodied forms of organizational life (Aboulafia, 2002: 3). However, while Habermas distrusts common sense, he tends to privilege a rational consensus in his conception of 'ideal speech situations' against a background of freedom and thereby indeterminate interactions (Denzin, 1996). This is problematic insofar as a democratic organization does not necessarily produce human flourishing especially if there is a failure 'to protect the individual from "the dirt" – including the existential insecurity – associated with competing (diverse) value-orientations' (Willmott, 1993: 534). Mead provides Habermas with a plausible reconciliation between the social formations of consciousness, through which, the 'individual projects himself [sic] in the direction of a "larger society"' (Habermas, 1992: 183) and the "freedom" of individuals 'who are socialized in increasingly differentiated conditions' concerning social discourses (ibid.: 151). Heidegger's analysis of 'being in the world' had prepared Habermas for Mead's theory of the self[ii] through which to develop 'the liberal spirit

of radical democracy' (Habermas, 2002: 228). Less optimistically, however, poststructuralist thinkers, including Foucault, developed Heidegger's ideas, in combination with Nietzsche, to show how subjectivity is a product of discursive power (Heyes, 2010).

Broadly speaking, poststructuralist thought seeks to reconcile the drive, energy and "freedom" of subjects within the constraints of power-knowledge relations and social institutions 'that have a tendency to reproduce themselves. However, CMS and CMEL increasingly draw upon an overt rejection of metanarratives of 'innate free will and rationality' (Garrison, 1998: 111). Consequently, it can be argued that one intellectual foundation of CMS is the pragmatism of Mead as a framework for understanding identity and subjectivity (Knights & Willmott, 1999). While informed by the self-formation process developed by Mead, it also relies on a Foucauldian relational view of power that is seen as conditioned by but also constitutes subjectivity. At the same time, Foucault's later work (1986; 1997) encourages a refusal of the effects of this power through a self-reflexive and ethical re-formation of the self with care at its core. A pragmatist alternative was provided by Dewey and Mead that contrasted with what Garrison (1998) describes as Foucault's self-prepossessed version of self-formation:

> 'In self-creation for Dewey, creating better community and better communion with individual others took precedence whereas for Foucault community and individual others were secondary' (Garrison, 1998: 112).

While Foucault's analysis was informed by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, he tended to reject phenomenology more generally and certainly did not consult the pragmatist Dewey or the identity analyses of Mead. This, we suggest, is a weakness that prevented Foucault from interrogating the self to the same extent as power for although he did see 'attachment' to identity as a kind of 'madness' (Foucault, 1961: 23), he did not explore the conditions that make this attachment possible beyond examining the exercises of power through which it is invoked. Consequently, he failed to 'specify the nature of the human material upon which

techniques of power and knowledge operate' (Knights, 1990: 325). To do this does not demand a return to the metanarrative of an essential self to which identity work theorists occasionally slide (Knights & Clarke, 2017) and is common in everyday life and the media. Rather, it entails drawing on the pragmatists and symbolic interactionists that see the self-formation process as inseparable from the community (e.g., Dewey, 1997b). While this may be a source of the exercise of power that conditions the self-formation process, it is not totalizing in its determination of identity, and some identity work does strive to transform these conditions through, for example, challenging the hegemonic power of compulsory heterosexualities (Seidman, 2009) or masculinities (Grosz, 1994; Braidotti, 2011; 2013). To the consternation of many feminists, Foucault refused to enter debates on gender, but this was because he rejected the hegemonic heterosexuality and homosociality that was sometimes an unintended consequence of sex binary discourses in defence of women (Knights & Kerfoot, 2004). However, Mead's theory helps us to understand how identity can itself be an obstacle to such transformations insofar as its fragility, precariousness, and impermanence renders subjects insecure and prepared to sacrifice their freedom in the pursuit of some order and stability for the self (ibid.).

A community-driven or other-directed sense of self-formation (Dewey, Mead), rather than Foucault's 'ideal of autonomous self-creation' (Garrison, 1998: 129), could avoid the potential dangers of self-indulgence. However, it might fail to recognise how an attachment to identity could be the very obstacle to achieving communal transformations that are themselves (inherently) necessary for also transforming the self. Moreover, Foucault's care for the self is not simply about autonomous self-creation for it was steeped in a 'hyper and pessimistic activism' (1997: 255) 'not in order to escape from the world but in order to act properly in it' (2005: 702). Caring for the self can also be seen as ethics insofar as it is the 'form that freedom

takes when it is informed by reflection' (Foucault, 1997: 284) and more importantly his claim that truth demands a position of otherness (Foucault, 2011b: Location 7384).

While it is plain that Foucault did not ground his 'theory of the subject' in Meadian symbolic interactionism, he followed Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in 'identifying freedom as residing in self-consciousness and the ability for human beings to see themselves as both subjects and objects of their own activities' (Knights & Willmott, 1999: 164). Foucault, like Mead, rejected the notion of a transcendental ego, and in following Merleau-Ponty, comes close to espousing Mead's theory of self-consciousness; that is, meanings are never passively assimilated 'from an external, cosmic order that is already fixed and established' as realists imagine, 'nor constructed *de novo* by a creative mind', as idealists suppose (Garrison, 1998: 113 emphasis in original). Foucault, like Mead, wished to capture the embodied, relational and active (pragmatic) aspects of human thought and consciousness. Though Mead privileges cognition, he recognises, like Merleau-Ponty, that 'the sense we develop is primarily based on the feel we have of our body and the way it connects us to the world… based on the sense of being embodied and the way in which this is mediated by cultural representations' (Burkitt, 1999: 76). We embody identities that are sensed by others, 'not only in the way we act but in our whole demeanour and expressions, as a kind of aura or atmosphere given off' (Burkitt, 2014: 113). Mead focuses on the fluid and social nature of identities and this is the very condition of possibility for thinking 'differently, rather than just legitimating what one already knows' – one of Foucault's major preoccupations (Foucault, 1992: 16) and an essential part of his ethical 'philosophy-as-life' (Foucault, 1983: 374).

Mead's theory of the self and the 'symbolic interactionism' that he inspired, which 'takes identity as the central focus' (see Knights & Willmott, 1999: 53), are pivotal also to

Weick's sensemaking perspective on identity work. This sensemaking is intricately linked to those situations that disturb identity positions such that people are forced to reflect on their underlying assumptions, through which new behaviours might emerge (Weick, 1995). Weick draws directly on Mead's 'psychological form of sociology' (Adler et al., 2007: 23) and the meanings that people reflexively attach to themselves and their situations, in adopting a critical, change-oriented, organizational perspective that is contingent on people's identity work. People continually form (and reform) identities in the course of their interactions with others such that the meanings (discourses) that constitute self-consciousness are prone to continuous reformation (Blumer, 1969). Thus, organizations (and learning) are performative achievements in which people exercise webs of meanings to constitute practices. These symbolic interactions are 'powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting' in terms of identities (Geertz, 1973: 90) through which, individuals orientate themselves within 'the ongoing course of experience' (Geertz, 1966: 6). Geertz and Weick (in explicitly following Mead) recognise that we become self-conscious (mindful) and active (sense-orientated) in response to interruptions in the everyday flow of habitual actions that frequently arise (Serpe & Stryker, 2011: 229). Moreover, this indeterminacy inspires a reflexive conversation with oneself (Mead, 1934).

We have sought to elaborate how, despite his neglect, Mead's theory of the self is exemplary as a means of critical reflexivity evident in much of the literature that has surrounded CMS and CMLE. It has been present in the work of Habermas (1984; 2002), in reflexive methodologies (Wacquant, 2015), in early process theories (Geertz, 1996; Weick, 1995) and adult learning theories (Schön, 1984). If, as Kolb (2015) notes, 'experience is already overlaid and saturated with the products of… reflection' (Dewey, 1929: 40) then we require a theory of self-refection that explores critically, rather than takes for granted, identity work. Although symbolic interaction is not directly evident in Foucault, we have shown how it could have

enhanced some of his later work and this was recognized by some of the early CMS and CMLE thinking (e.g., Knights, 1990). To illustrate this, we might consider embodied forms of autoethnography that are grounded in self-reflexivity, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and anthropology (Ellis, 1999). Within such work, reflection occurs when problems arise in one's situation that is 'quite different from the non-(self)-conscious reasonableness that guides our daily unproblematic practices' (Aboulafia, 1999: 159). Thus, as we now argue, we might revisit Mead's ideas on (inter)subjectivity to problematize attachments to identity and their implications for CMLE and learning more generally. As Mead makes clear, our identities are constituted through meaningful social interactions and thus, it is through social interaction (including our engagement with students) that we can learn to think (and perhaps feel) differently. To illustrate the relationship between the various approaches that can be seen to have stimulated and/or characterized critical teaching and learning in management, we now present a table that summarizes a selection of the literature and how we see it relating to CMLE theory, Mead's symbolic interactionism and learning to think differently. We aim to encapsulate how, by engaging with Mead, we can embrace and enhance a critical pedagogy.

[Insert Table 1. here]

As our table reveals, the ongoing conversations that constitute our identity work as CMLE teachers and learners provide fertile grounds for a Meadean pedagogy. What, then, prevents us from engaging in such practices if, as we have suggested, institutional arrangements do not *necessarily* impede us from engaging in identity work through which we can question our assumptions to think differently? However, as we argue in this essay, in and of itself identity work does not always challenge our attachments to, or preoccupations, with identity. Furthermore, analyses of identity work may reflect and reproduce such attachments to our identities (Knights and Clarke, 2017). We need to transcend these if we are to depart from the implicit legacy of mainstream theory to construct each of us as unified, universal

subjects/objects, rather than accept 'contradiction as an organizer of experience' (Hatch, 1997: 285). We now attempt to explicate this by discussing the complex, emergent and dynamic *potentialities* for learning to think and feel differently through seeking to explore a little beyond Mead.

IN ENGAGING WITH MEAD, WE MIGHT GO BEYOND HIS ANALYSIS

> 'The goal of education, if we are to survive, is the facilitation of change and learning… no knowledge is secure… only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security' (Rogers, 1969: 152).

Despite understanding at a cognitive level how the attachment to an identity is invariably absurd, counterproductive and self-defeating, in our practice we cannot avoid feeling a little pleased when occasionally we receive positive reviews of our teaching. Even though critical of the literature on identity work for often being cognitive, disembodied, and too intentional, we have to recognize that such analysis does not guarantee to render us immune to feeling hurt by negative criticisms of our teaching. Yet unless we abandon, or at least limit, this attachment to an identity of competence as teachers as well as critics, we will be more concerned to have positive feedback rather than encourage ourselves, as well as our students, to challenge one another to think and feel differently. This is necessary if we are to engage in thought that frees … 'itself from what it thinks (the present)' … in order … 'to "think otherwise" (the future)' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 119).

In this sense, learning involves transforming how we understand our experiences of 'reality' to free ourselves to think differently. In so doing, we can 'come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation' (Freire, 1970: 83). This is a process with parallels in Dewey's participatory theory of knowledge (1997a), which is aimed at subjecting '…that to which we are thoroughly accustomed' (1933: 289) to evaluation and

critique. Dewey was convinced that we develop our ability for dialogue by participating in democratically orientated and culturally sensitive forms of debate where we reflect on our assumptions and subject them to interrogation by others whose interpretations and judgements give point and direction to our own.

Part of the failure to live up to this challenge, of course, is our embeddedness in educational institutions that have exercised power over us to produce expectations that we academics teach, and the students who attend our classes learn, rather than us learning together. Like Foucault, we feel some discomfort in teaching insofar as it usually involves 'exercising a relationship of power with respect to an audience' (Foucault, 1994: 786, quoted in Foucault, 2004: xv). In his introduction, Davidson (Foucault, 2004: xv-xvi) goes on to say and we now paraphrase it: The traditional teacher first makes his audience feel guilty for their lack of knowledge; then obliges them to learn what the teacher knows; and finally, seeks verification that they have indeed learned what they have been taught through assessed work and examinations. We share some of this discomfort but wonder whether Foucault is not contradicting his insistence that power is not *necessarily* negative and oppressive or constraining; it can also be positive and productive, thus enhancing our freedom to be other than we are (Foucault, 1982)? We may find it difficult to avoid 'lecturing at', by contrast with 'lecturing through', students but we must always try if the experience is to be transformative (Dewey, 1997a: 38).

As Mead notes, because we have 'all sorts of different selves answering to all sorts of different social reactions' the self is always a potential site of transformation (1934: 142). However, such identity work is rendered difficult in practice, because 'it is the social process itself that is responsible for the appearance of the self; it is not there as a self apart from this…

experience' (Mead, 1934: 142). In short, thinking differently involves being forced *by experience* to reflect 'on what we are readily invoked to think' (Currie & Knights, 2003: 46). Thus, learning to think differently involves experiencing oppositional or contradictory discourse, practices and modes of being that allow one to think and feel differently. It also involves cultivating the 'courage' to 'embrace discomfort' (Foucault, 1997: 137). Of course, we may feel this discomfort at the moment, but we are unable to reflect consciously at one and the same time as, so much as after, a given experience. For, the self is temporal; it is often only experienced when we are confronted 'by the occurrence of an event that thrusts itself toward creating new, emergent possibilities' (Simpson, 2009: 1337).

Our identification with critical theory and praxis is, for us, a vital resource for remaining out of sync with the culture in which we work where there is pressure from many directions to facilitate the status quo, advance the instrumental goals of leaders, facilitate students' concern for a passport to a 'good' job. A critical management identity can act as a bastion against anxieties inherent to processes of self (re-)formation because it is resistant to business school managerialist norms as well as students' taken for granted beliefs in career success. However, we might avoid the complacency that locks us into a sense of our own beliefs, and this is where challenging debates with our students can facilitate thinking and feeling differently no matter how uncomfortable this may be and, in this spirit, we now confront some potential myopias in critical management education.

Even though (over time) and on occasion, we may resolve the precariousness of self (Burkitt, 2008: 184), the indeterminacy that is endemic to self-knowledge remains. The social confirmation of others, on which the self relies, is always unpredictable, incomplete and radically plural (Law, 2004: 2). At the same time, our struggles with indeterminacy might be

a learning experience where 'a mind folded back in the intimacy of itself… can develop its potentialities by the deepening of the self' (Foucault, 2011a: 162). Here, we have the prospect of freedom that facilitates living differently through challenging taken-for-granted norms and subjectivities (Foucault, 1982; 2011b). However, this potential 'openness' is forever threatened by subversion from preoccupations with, and attachments to, illusory solid senses of self and identity.

First, while Mead's conception of reflection and reflexivity provides a valuable heuristic through which to illustrate underlying processes of identity work, we are in danger of tacitly reifying his analytical distinctions to result in believing that we can discover our 'true', essential self, amidst the 'generalizable' and amorphous world of sociality that we confront. How frequently do we hear of people, especially those 'successful' in some walk of life, claiming to have come to recognize "who they are" or to have discovered their "real self" as if this had been the key to the treasures of life, and recommended to others as transformative? Secondly, in attempting to secure a valued identity - as reflexive teachers – we also express several, worryingly, narcissistic traits used here not as signifying all that is bad in ourselves and the culture (Gabriel, 2004: 19), but more narrowly to how we become obsessed with stabilising and securing the self through identity (Knights & Clarke, 2017). Thirdly, our attempts to mirror moral codes, which in a utopian environment might be mutually beneficial to all, are (to some extent) an 'instrumental resource for securing the self through having one's identity socially confirmed' (Knights, 2006: 265). Thus, we can become subject to degradation through being too attached to our identity such that we can think of nothing else but to strive to secure it. This 'breaks [one's] links with others' and 'ties [one to]… identity in a constraining way' (Foucault, 1982: 781) to forestall learning, growth and care for the self, through which we might all be transformed and begin to think and feel differently.

TO CONCLUDE

As Mead makes clear, the self is generated through reflection within the pedagogy in which it develops – stimulated and induced by the 'significant gestures' of others (1934: 14). By considering how emotions drive self-reflection about our interactions with others, we have problematized our attachments to identity and argued that we need to think beyond 'reflective practice' to consider how power constitutes intensifying venues of experience - through which, the self emerges in a 'search for truth, in order to cope with real problems encountered in the course of action' (Joas, 1996: 128; see Rabinow, 2011).

Learning, from a Meadian perspective, may involve working through, identifying with, embodying - and interrogating - our attachments to identity by engaging in 'meaningful, creative, radically undetermined, but not yet conscious, interaction' with others (Biesta, 1998: 73) through which one's thinking might shift following the knowledge that this engenders. Rather than conceive such identity work as a struggle between selves, we might conceive our embodied interactions with indeterminate others as an opportunity to reflect on our situation through social gestures - within which - 'different and enlarged and more adequate [identities] may emerge' (Mead, 1913: 379). We might act 'in a very intelligent fashion without there being a self involved in the experience' (Mead, 1934: 136) and yet, we are subject to 'a precarious set of symbols with which we just happen to have identified' (Knights & Willmott, 1999: 74). Thus, while identity can prevent us from challenging ourselves, we always embody the potential to question the circumstances of our production and engage in processes of transformation through which new selves may emerge.

For, insofar as it is about thinking differently, learning involves identity work and, as Mead (1934) makes clear, this is exercised through our engagement with, and reaction to, indeterminacy. So, learning to think differently through confronting indeterminacy necessarily is disruptive of the complacency of settled identities. But simply recognizing this cognitively is insufficient for then we can easily find intellectual rationalizations for remaining the same such as, for example, arguing that the institutional demands deprive us of the time to teach and learn differently. Consequently, it is necessary that we embrace pedagogic change not just intellectually but also in an embodied and engaged manner that leaves our identities far more 'open', indeterminate, and vulnerable to unpredictable exigencies, as Corlett et al. (2021) seek to argue concerning executive adult education.

Our embodied values, emotions and practices are mediated through productive interactions with others, and thus, potentially always subject to transformation. Mead's notion of self-learning is unstructured, processual and pragmatic, such that, reflexivity and indeterminacy are central to his analysis – and to learn to think and feel differently, which is the benchmark for teaching from a critical management perspective, if not for all teaching. Following Mead requires that we eschew the coercion of unitary, formal and instrumental discourses and replace them with *diverse and participatory forms* of knowledge, produced with others and inclusive of a plurality of views. In practical terms, this involves debating, working through, identifying with, and embodying normative, oppositional and contradictory discourses. In doing so, we might stimulate and inculcate in our students (and ourselves) the urge to transform understanding through thinking and feeling differently in ways that challenge prevailing identities, cultural norms and political economy.

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Table 1

Sociology of Knowledge: CMLE Theory, Mead and Learning to think differently

Theory and Practice	
Critical Cultural theory	Mead and Foucault: self-knowledge and learning
Rather than focus on the teacher–student relationship, our attention falls on creating an atmosphere that generates engaging interactions between people (Harney 2007).	Learning as an ongoing process in identity work through which we become different selves, even though we only realise this over time.
In classroom interactions, we try to submit underlying assumptions to evaluation and critique (Harney and Linstead 2009).	Accepting the indeterminacy of self means abandoning certainty by telling 'truths' about ourselves (and our deeply held beliefs) in order to 'listen' intently to others' responses.
Labour process theory	
Students are encouraged to contribute to the classroom agenda by viewing learning as a tension between competing ideas. Classroom interactions involve a 'bottom up' process through which cooperation, conflict and alternative outcomes within labour processes can be examined and critiqued (Huzzard 2000).	Community and collaboration between organizational citizens can be achieved through highlighting the self-constituting possibilities of mutuality, solidarity and empathy. The learning challenge is to foster collaborative engagement, by identifying differing perspectives and engaging critically with their conditions of possibility.

Engaging in open conversations with students enables us to recognise their everyday realities yet also to show how they might be challenged and transformed through theory, different forms of rationality and alternative practices (Forrester 1989).

Our emphasis is on accepting the indeterminacy of self and thereby embracing 'uncertainty', for this is how both teachers and students can become mutually engaged in transforming ideas, values, practices and identities.

The classroom is a venue where the everyday, unreflective, lifeworld can become a discursive resource for reasoning and critical evaluation. Different forms of knowledge (instrumental, aesthetic, ethical, and practical) are a resource for reflection and synthesis (Geiger & Schreyögg 2009).

We cannot free ourselves to think independently but can reflect on our attachments to specific institutionalized or personal identities by having our viewpoints (and dispositions) subjected to inquiry and reasonable debate. The emphasis is *not* on teaching people to think differently, but on creating the conditions where this becomes possible or difficult to disavow.

Typical classroom encounters are built on 'answers not questions and on teaching rather than learning', where teachers "talk at" students in seeking to transfer knowledge. By contrast, learning to think differently is an outcome of interactions, including debate, disagreement and public reflection (Heifetz, 1994: 531).

Learning to think differently involves actively (and self-consciously) engaging in and with the views and gestures of others. Active learning involves stimulation, reflection and improvisation in response to the indeterminate practices of others, which engage us in identity work.

We require affective spaces (heterotopias) in which we are surprised and moved through our interactions with others. This requires inspired debates, innovative ideas on organization, management, and leadership (Beyes & Michel 2011).

We recognise our self in the discursive practices of others which enables mutual empathies to prevail. The goal is to form an epistemic community for enhancing knowledge by challenging or disrupting underlying taken-for-granted assumptions. This way, we are all able to reconsider different ideas and practices concerning the conditions that make them possible.

Teachers and students are disciplined to think of learning as an end in itself, for example, to secure high grades. As Foucault notes, instrumental discourses are performative and may be used 'as tools' for different means. We can (re)define 'competence' as the ability to analyse and problematize neoliberal ideology and 'capital centric' readings (Brewis 1996; Fournier 2006)?

One's habits are stimulated (and self-disciplined) through the rules of the game. How can we emphasise the 'means to', rather than focus on the 'institutionalised ends'? The goal is to inculcate in our students a desire to critically reflect on normative habits as a resource for developing their productive power, the outcome of which, rather than just the intention, may result in higher grades.

Sensemaking theory

We are prone to introspection when we encounter beauty, anguish, mortality, love, bureaucracy, corruption, misbehaviour and so forth. The self is a temporal, relational and dynamic process, which is triggered and punctured by symbolic encounters that

Identities emerge at the threshold of people's past and future experiences, through episodic, experimental and provisional accomplishments in relation to others. By triggering students' empathy, identification and imagination, we engage the (autoethnographic) experiences of others. In doing so, we

give us pause for thought and orientate us towards possible futures (Colville, et al. 2014; O'Shea 2019).

become conscious of new aspects of reality that might frame our ongoing practices, including reflections and talk.

Our attachment to identity can lead us to a fundamental narcissism that is reflected in deceiving ourselves that 'the echoes we hear around us are signs of agreement and compatibility, rather than mirroring or subservience'. Yet, through debate and conjecture, we can question our assumptions, open up and widen the possibilities of sensemaking for learning (Tomkins & Ulus 2015: 603)

What people commonly refer to as 'I' is allusive, plastic and always in the process of changing. There is no 'I' behind our embodied actions but rather 'an interactional self, similar to and different from others' (Jenkins 2004: 39). This means that learning to think differently is derived from our engagement with the voices of others who provide a foil for self-reflection and embodied learning.

How can we promote and engage critical theories that inspire sensemaking by challenging (and dislocating) taken-for-granted assumptions and practices? Taking care to debate the emotions that such discursive practices engender to better understand and moderate resistance to thinking differently (Sinclair 2007).

Pedagogy is brought, as far as possible, into a realm where critical and ethical theory constitutes classroom debate. For, it is abstract yet embodied thinking that people become engaged in a self-reflexive conversation with their assumptions, and in doing so, engage in identity work that is not simply about securing the self.

Notes

[i] This early CMS work was also investigating questions of gender and strategy (Knights and Collinson, 1987; Knights and Morgan, 1991).
[ii] Habermas himself commissioned the first German translation of Mead's (1934) work.