Participatory Process and Justice Oriented Thinking in Large Group Lectures

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Purpose

Drawing on Freireian ideas, Development Education (DE) seeks to engage learners in an active way with concepts and information, rather than to have them "**lectured into sleepy silence**" (Shor 1993, p 25). Yet, when we found ourselves lecturing to a class of up to 300 student teachers on the philosophy of education, we found ourselves lecturing, and we found them sitting in sleepy silence. We began to re-imagine what a lecture might look like were the DE concepts of critical and creative thinking to be taken seriously.

Shor, I. (1993) Education is politics: Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, in: McLaren, P. & Leonard, P. (Eds) *Paulo Freire, A Critical Encounter,* pp. 25-35. (London, Routledge)
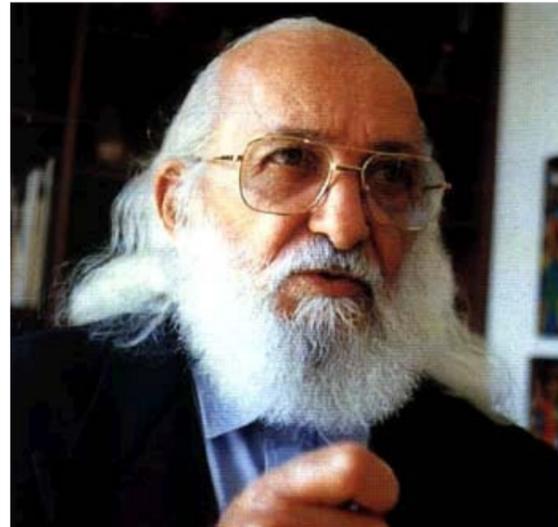
Paulo Freire

Results

The evaluations of the intervention were largely positive.
- o The **questionnaire** found that 51% of students felt the activities helped them to engage with the course material (twice as many as those who did not),
- o 55% said that the use of interactive activities in lectures helped to develop their thinking skills (almost three times the number that did not).

At the same time, it was clear that there were a considerable number of students who were unsure about how to evaluate the programme: questions about students' overall learning had the highest rate of "don't know" responses (39.3% and 42.8%).

This ambiguity was further explored in the **focus groups**, which highlighted that there were a considerable number of students who were unsure as to how they learned or about what it meant to learn and how 'learning' related to critical thinking.

Methodology

We used an **action research** methodology, with **two cycles** of action and data collection.
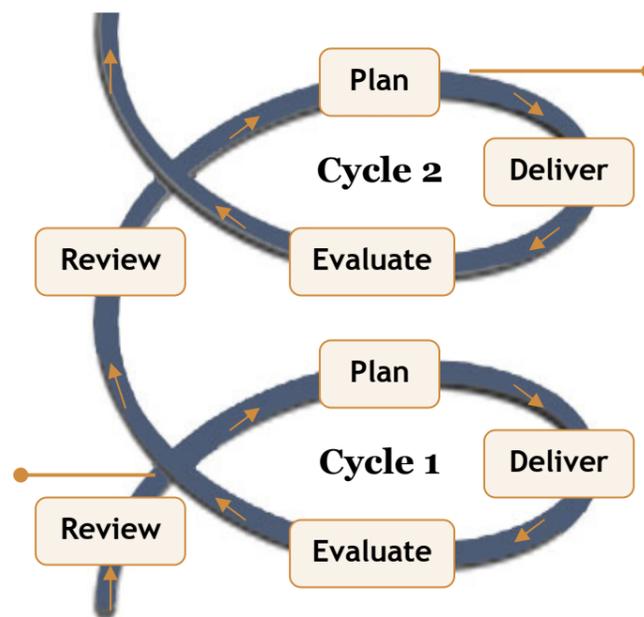
Cycle 1

Review of 'lecturing' situation drawing on…
- o informal conversations with students and colleagues,
- o review of the literature,
- o process of values clarification.

Planning and **delivery** of an alternative to the traditional lecture series, using **video,** and **in-class discussion**.

Evaluation of the lecture series through a student **questionnaire.**

Plan

Cycle 2

Deliver

Review

Evaluate

Plan

Cycle 1

Deliver

Review

Evaluate

The Action Research Spiral

Cycle 2

Review of the lecture series (informed by questionnaire results from Cycle 1).

Two of the project lectures were **delivered** in the traditional style and two lectures in the new format – this facilitated students in making a comparison between the traditional and the new format.

Evaluation of the lecture series using, **non-participant observation during lectures** and **student focus groups**.

"It's kind of a Catch 22 situation cause it's the boring type lecture is what we learn most in. The traditional gets boring – after 15 minutes you want to get out but you are still learning more"

"I think I remembered more [in the non-traditional lecture] anyway because of different experiences. But I don't know how it will transfer when it comes to exams. I have the notes to refer to from the traditional [lecture] but I can't really remember the lecture"

- Comments from student focus groups

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