Qualitative Techniques for Reflecting On Pedagogy

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Abstract

For educators that have been trained in ethnographic and qualitative research methods meeting the inevitable challenge of reflecting on one's pedagogy may, at first take, seem to be a simple strategy of mobilizing the techniques we know best – i.e. it's another ethnographic-like puzzle to tackle, business as usual, etc. Better yet, some may be tempted to assert that as reflexive (or hyper-reflexive) individuals constantly engaged in the iterative process of monitoring performances, eliciting open feedback, confronting one's subjectivity, and so on there is little need to serious ponder the role of qualitative techniques when one's pedagogy is at stake. We resist these two common sense views. In this article we argue that not only is the process of reflecting on pedagogy both like and not like the process of reflecting on the research endeavor, and one's position there, but that one can enhance his or her techniques through active practice. Overall, we aim to share our experiences, pose some questions, and offer some potential points of guidance rather than prescribe a set of rules, regulations, and boundaries.

We find it reasonable to start a paper concerning the intersection of qualitative techniques and the processes of reflecting on pedagogy with some reflections of our own. These opening reflections however will concern broader issues in higher education that we view as being inseparable from the question of pedagogy and the techniques devised to know about it, its effects, our position(s) or role(s), and so on. While we draw upon a few personal examples in an attempt to flesh out the main issues we raise, most of our interest centers on generating questions, which may prove to be of some use to teachers who are currently engaged in the process of mulling over their own pedagogy. In other words, we aim not to offer a static horizon in which one must work within when pondering pedagogy within the postmodern university, but rather an invitation to dialogue. We then migrate to a discussion of the techniques we have used to think about our own pedagogy over the last four semesters.

Education and the Fetishistic Disavowal[1]

While Slavoj Žižek is perhaps best known for his writings on Lacanian psychoanalysis, philosophy, ideology, pop culture, and host of other topics, one doesn't have to labor endlessly through his ever-expanding corpus to locate ideas that offer insight on the status of higher education in postmodern society. Indeed, in one of his well known earlier works Žižek introduces the notion of 'fetishistic disavowal' to assert the enduring importance of the concept of ideology and to explore why its hold on us persists despite knowledge of its falsity (1989:28-33). According to Žižek, the minimal formulation of this logic is this: '*We know very well…, but nonetheless act as if we don't.'* To illustrate this logic with an example let's take the issue of racism. Geneticists (and Franz Boas no doubt) have long asserted that humans are, by and large, made of the same substance – or, more precisely, that there are no clear genetic markers between what we perceive as racial or ethnic groups, that there is more genetic variation within a group then between, etc. – but nonetheless, we act as if we don't know this through our actions, by subtlety or not so subtlety making racist jokes, creating exclusionary policies, and 'taking flight' when they move into our neighborhoods and so on. In this scenario the racist is fetishistic in practice, not theory.

In other words, racism can no longer be said to be predominantly the vocation of the ignorant, a problem of knowledge (i.e. "If you only took the time to know them you would change your mind"), but something else. What accounts for this disconnect between knowledge and doing? Žižek explores this problematic through the category of 'fantasy', which for Lacanians is much more than the occasional ephemeral imaginary indulgence, but rather that which provides a necessary ontological slant on reality (i.e., it makes us objectively subjective). For Žižek, the fetishistic disavowal structures our reality; it shapes human existence, and must somehow be acknowledged rather than resisted or ignored in psychoanalytical understandings of social life and understandings of ideology. For us, this notion of fetishistic disavowal provides a potent starting point when it comes to thinking about certain fundamental impasses or irrationalities that characterize university life, and of course when it comes to thinking about one's pedagogy.

So how may this notion of fetishistic disavowal relate to education? All kinds of analyses, from Derridean deconstructive analyses to those emerging from feminist or post-feminist thought, have long uncovered how certain (or most, depending on the analysis) educational practices and policies contain hidden or not so hidden gender, class, and racial biases; that students are perhaps unknowingly being groomed for capitalist production by attending universities when they think they are learning 'neutral' knowledge, and so on (e.g., Ng, Staton, & Scane, 1995; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1998; Trifonas & Peters, 2004). Even more, many of these analyses have seriously thrown into question notions of power, authority, and empowerment and their relations to university life (e.g. Gore, 1993). The basic point here is that it is undeniable that serious intellectual labor has been invested in unveiling and delineating the symptoms of higher education (and society as well). Of course, the catch is this: despite this widely available knowledge many of the repeatedly fingered problems of higher education persist (see below for some examples). Does this mean that educators should abandon these kinds of endeavors altogether? We tend to think no, but we also think that a healthy suspicion of Enlightenment campaigns – the ones that purport to unveil and transform through knowledge; the ones that see illusions only on the side of theory, not practice – is necessary. Another consequence of thinking about education vis-à-vis the notion of fetishistic disavowal concerns the question of just what it takes to transform academic discourse and practice. Is it through more academic discourse (more Discourse of the University, to follow Lacan [2006]), and the generation of more abstract symbolic knowledge? How does one both exit the system and reflect upon it. We'll leave these questions open.

Admittedly, some of the aforementioned ideas lack tangible examples. Hence, we select one of our teaching experiences for an example and develop it below. However, let's start with a general discussion of what can be called the dangers of teaching narrowly. While this can be defined in a number ways, we simply mean a pedagogy that take as its main goal the practical and testable (with the expectation that students regurgitate concepts, dates, etc. and be satisfied with their new found knowledge; i.e. competency must be immediate, students must readily demonstrate mastery, etc.). The danger here seems to be at least twofold. First, it risks turning the whole classroom experience into one populated by trainers and trainees (to slightly borrow from [Wolcott, 1994]), which may end up ultimately being a homage to vocationalism. Secondly, it indirectly creates a fruitless opposition between theoretical knowledge or pursuits and those deemed applied. Moreover, and to dwell on this latter issue, what seems to be a kneejerk reaction today is that higher education must be in the service of applied applications or else it is selfish, exploitative, focused on career building, and so forth (see Žižek's YouTube video[2]). Are 'pure' and 'applied' approaches to education really such autonomous domains? Is there no fruitful commensurability to speak of? Regardless of where one stands on this issue, this approach to pedagogy carries with it a rather gloomy notion of empowerment, which is often conceived as little more than equipping students with a properly objectified skill set to sell on the market.

Now for my (Patrick's) brief example: In retrospect, the first time I taught the large (400 students) Anthropology 101 course I was guilty of teaching narrowly. Somewhat expectedly, part of the reason for my approach during this time stems from the fact that I was a bit nervous. Organizing a large course, deciding the balance between breadth and depth in lectures, developing assignments, and so on are all daunting the first (or even the second or third) time I teach a new course. While this nervousness lessens as the semester proceeds and with increasing familiarity with the course, I certainly don't want to create the impression that this nervousness fully recedes; even after the second or third time with a course there is still a bit of unease concerning my approach, material selection, lectures, and assignments.

However, I've come to embrace this sensation and see it as a consequence of my goal of constantly experimenting with course design, which, minimally, includes reading outside my sliver of specialized university knowledge and constantly reflecting upon, and modifying, my authority and position within the classroom. A certain level of uncertainty and unease lets me know I'm in the right place (for students as well).

The other reason for teaching narrowly that semester was – let's face it – the desire to be desired. I'm certainly not immune to the indefatigable push for visibility in the university. And creating a series of well defined hurdles for students to quickly surmount, which is the modus operandi of teaching narrowly, almost guarantees two things: (1) that student demands to 'get what they paid for' are met and they walk away feeling competent, (2) the teacher get to teach again (i.e. the teacher maintains the position of 'the one supposed to know', the expert of knowledge who legitimizes what goes on in the classroom). While I wasn't using qualitative methods in an organized and intentional way to reflect on this course, it's easy to say that both of these semi-guarantees held true. A few face to face interactions with students, teacher evaluation results, and comments for teaching assistants and other colleagues indicated that the course was a real 'success'. I also taught it again the next semester.

I certainly don't feel I have transcended the temptation to teach narrowly. It can be too convenient at times, especially when one is starting his or her academic career. As it stands, other than making a small pitch for constantly experimenting with pedagogical strategies in the classroom, I wouldn't dare hazard a series of naïve suggestions that one must adhere to during the quest to break away from the lure of teaching narrowly – an approach that recreates a situation of evaluative control, conceives students as objects, and engenders other issues. However, constant experimentation (which often includes a healthy dose of cynicism for the teacher role) only seems worthwhile when it is in some results in avoiding perpetuating the notion that the only worthwhile knowledge is that which is practical and testable (or, to say it differently, steering clear of the idea that simplicity is the primary attribute of truth). In other words, I feel successful in the classroom when intellectual inquiry is no longer equated with increasing one's productivity; getting a better job. I can think of no quick fixes.

There are other ways in which this fetishistic disavowal seems to operate in the university. But again it is worth reiterating that simply drawing them to light, perhaps strangely enough, seems to do little in terms of change. For example, there is great fear of neoliberal ideals further colonizing university life; its deleterious effects are often readily apparent, but nonetheless many intensify its influence by fetishizing time, avoiding talking about neoliberalism or continue to be insensitive to ecological issues, insisting that adjuncts remain unionless, etc. Shutting the university off to the broader society doesn't seem to be a solution. The difficult question we're left with is: what accounts for the compulsion to repeat the same mistakes over and over again in the face of the falsity or, said differently, despite having the cognitive knowledge that would suggest we do otherwise? For us, the question of reflecting on one's pedagogy involves thinking about these impasses conditioned by fetishistic disavowal and the questions that are generated. It bears repeating that our discussion here on the fetishistic disavowal and university life is not offer some hope for transformation through identification, but rather to illustrate the importance of assuming the structuring nature of the fetishistic disavowal when reflecting.

Pedagogical Discourses: Radicalizing And Democrcratizing

The critiques of education by those wielding critical theory have spawned a plethora of pedagogical discourses that offer an impressive array of solutions to the symptoms or deadlocks of higher education, as well as overlapping and competing notions of what constitutes intellectual inquiry, what is emancipation and responsibility for the student, what it means to be empowered, and indeed, what is a meaningful life. The ascendency of postmodernism in the university has only served to amplify the number of pedagogical discourses that purport to change the rules of the game, offer new forms of freedom, unmask, etc. Our intention in this section in not to disentangle to growing number of fragmenting pedagogical discourses that promise, what seem to be, increasingly particularized forms of emancipation (e.g. not just freedom from patriarchical structures as such, but freedom from *these specific* patriarchical structures as experienced by a particular group of women with a seemingly unique set of historical experiences that come from a specific geographic location and have similar narratives of oppression to share…and so forth) but instead to discuss two trends that have cropped-up in various discourses. It goes without saying that we find these trends or broadly shared strategies as important referents during the process of reflection.

Radicalizing

To borrow a popular rock band name while I was growing up, it has become my impression that when it comes to university life nothing seems more radical to students than the instructor who Rage[s] Against the Machine. The professor who goes against the grain – the eccentric individual who suspends, inverts, or discards certain university rules or broader educational norms and occasionally risks his or her neck – is the one who often seems to be truly *for* the students. What is at work here? Participating in what appears to be a rare and subversive approach to education (for the teacher and student), which of course must be done in some way under the nose of the university, may constitute a 'dirty little secret' that serves to enhance solidarity and create the impression of embarking on something truly original. (In Lacanese this is transgressive jouissance functioning as fundamental social bond. Rather than undermining social solidarity, it serves as its positive condition [see Žižek 1997:22-23 for a variation of this example]).

This radical approach may also resonate strongly with students who are influenced by, whether they know it or not, the discourses of postmodernism and extreme liberal multiculturalism. Relativist notions of truth, a constant pursuit of, and respect for, multiple subjectivities (which of course when teamed with bureaucratic may actually serve to ossify differences and neglect the dynamics of identity), a questioning of symbolic power, and so forth – may all serve to make the apparent subversion of the grand narrative promised by the radical pedagogue more attractive. While we have found this general strategy seductive at times, the initial seductiveness has turned into a deep suspicion. There are two reasons for this. First, a radical pedagogy, however defined, may quickly backfire if the instructor repeatedly denies power she derives from the university (Lynch & Jukuri, 1998). Students know very well that the university structure is one that places the instructor in a position of power and grants them authority.

When this is routinely denied one may soon be up to his ears in uprising. I (Patrick) start most of the class I teach with a brief reminder of the structure we are immersed in and that I take the duty seriously. Very few seem surprised to hear this. It is my hope however that this reminder doesn't simply serve to reinforce dominant structures but rather provides an initial impetus for students to examine their own relationships to knowledge, power, language, and authority (which require additional responsibilities and strategies as well). Secondly, and perhaps equally troubling, is the question concerning just who are the authors of these radical pedagogies – the pedagogies that deviate from those that are sanctioned by the university? The radical academic Leftist? It bears mentioning Žižek's wager that today's radical academic may be nothing more than an individual who makes impossible demands against the system so that things stay the same (2002:59-61). The payoff is great: the instructor gets to appear very subversive – is favored by students – while simultaneously enjoys the privileges of the vey system she critiques. In other words, insofar as the vociferous demands are not actually met, the radical gets a clear radical conscience, a great opportunity to receive student acclaim, *and* maintains his privileged position[3].

Democratizing

Similar to Žižek's opening thoughts regarding the forced choice of today's politics, the fundamental choice presented to those constructing their pedagogical approach in higher education appears to be one of 'democracy or fundamentalism' (2002:3)? Either one structures her course in a way that liberates individuals – encourages students to develop their voice, participate, build consensus, etc. – or one is a shameless tyrant interested only in dictating, proselytizing, censoring open inquiry, or is guilty of other crimes. The fear of falling into this latter camp is quite palpable at any university, and many often go to great lengths to ensure that they don't. Later on in the same text Žižek avers when we come across a situation that appears to be marked by an apparent clarity of choice 'ideological mystification is total' (54). This applies quite well to what can be called a 'forced choice' in higher education, and demands some questioning: Is this really a true choice? Is democracy the only alternative to fundamentalism?[4] Other than offering our 'no' to both of these questions, our main intention in this section is not to delve further into these questions but to share a brief personal example of democratizing the classroom.
I (Patrick) took the opportunity on the last meeting of a course I taught on ethnographic and qualitative research methods to reflect upon experiences with the course. I've always dislike offering final a summation of course (whatever form this may take) and thought that one last open-ended reflection would be beneficial to all. It was, but I received a comment from a student that I didn't quite expect.

Shortly after trying to elicit some comments on the balance I struck between the breadth and depth of the course, I made some remarks on how I would have liked to have spent more time openly discussing their thoughts. While I meant this, I also felt I was trying to ensure that I wasn't cast as a tyrant guilty of imposing his vision of qualitative methods on them. I received some subtle non-verbal affirmations, but then a graduate student (the course was composed of both graduate and under-graduate students) began to speak up. This articulate student often spoke up and was well engaged in the course. He told me that he 'enjoyed my approach to the course' – that unlike his other course that often got side-tracked by student agendas mine had a better balance. Besides, he argued, 'I knew the material better than they did' so I should be the one doing most of the talking. These comments caught me off a bit off guard.

Reflecting on some of these comments now, it is clear that the student offered a resistance to my attempt to further democratize the classroom (or 'decenter' it as some would say). This event has made me wonder that if the postmodern university is one where power and authority are undermined (even for professors and others), how do we responded to a situation where students demand that the professor maintains a position of authority? The only clear lesson I took away from these comment is the one's attempt to democratize the classroom requires a consideration of the broader discourses that influence the students in one's class (including, of course, the academic discourse that aims for continual production of abstract symbolic knowledge and the alienation of the subject).[5] Additionally, despite the apparent open invention to assume the position of the expert of knowledge, I have my hesitations, for the position of the Master is an imaginary position and ultimately untenable.

The Classroom and the Field

The final topic we would like to briefly discuss speaks more directly to the central purpose of the paper. A question that is worth meditating on when it comes to qualitative methods, reflection, and pedagogy is: if qualitative research techniques are largely designed for the field, what makes them suitable for the classroom? Additional one could ask, are pedagogical strategies just as useful for reflecting on the field research experience? We offer a brief discussion of these questions and then share some techniques we have used in the final section of this paper.

There is considerable overlap between 'the classroom' and 'the field'. Indeed, the field for a researcher may be the classroom and its closely associated contexts. Seldom ever, however, is the professor's classroom also his or her exclusive research site (this would introduce some thorny issues, some perhaps insurmountable). Of course the similarity runs a bit deeper, and we'll survey a few in rapid succession: (1) We would like to think that both of these settings are not bound to particular geographic space, that they extend beyond fixed localities and are constituted through a complex web process and flows that are simultaneously internal and external to the setting. Moreover, both the classroom and the field enjoy an existence outside the institutional framework (even beyond the bureaucratic regulation organized by the IRB). Also, like 'the field' it is not clear where 'the classroom' begins and where it ends. (2) Many would like to think that both settings are marked by unfixed roles (or a mutability of positions with a certain cultural sanctioned horizon). For example, we have interesting reversals whereby the researcher gets researched, the teacher gets taught, and many other role configurations (some deemed culturally inappropriate as well). (3) Both are marked by meaningful exchanges. Some are apparent in their immediacy some are not (i.e. we witness many delayed realizations). The transformative potential of the encounter is always lurking in the background however. (4) Learning the language. For the anthropologist, learning an esoteric language was a longstanding requirement of professional training, changing only recently. For the professor, learning the new flood of neologisms and pop culture references ever semester often can make or break insights in a lecture.

We certainly won't claim to be exhaustive above. Further discussion of 'the field' can be found in Gupta and Ferguson's (1997) excellent edited volume. Fortunately, the reader is left with the task of thinking about the authors' ideas about the field vis-à-vis the classroom. To abbreviate this section a bit, we'll jump right to our initial take on the relationship between the field and the classroom. While there is considerable overlap between the two (e.g., in terms of demands, skill requirement, and kinds of engagements, institutional affiliation), we don't want to over-emphasize their similarity. There are important differences in what one does in the field and what one does in the classroom, and how one apprehends or engages the phenomena 'there', to say to broadly. However, we also don't want to overemphasize their dissimilarity or paint them as somehow mutually exclusive. Lacan would argue that both function as a University Discourse, which has its root in the Discourse of the Master.

The argument that both the research and the teacher, despite their efforts to avoid the image, are still seen as in possession of specialized knowledge and have a similar relationship to the production of knowledge can certainly be made. Additionally, one could argue that while researcher attempts to suspend her conceptual framework or guiding concept (by way of Grounded Theory or the like), evaluation and assessment are present throughout the whole endeavor (and necessarily so to a degree). Both the researcher and teacher must be interested in building their careers at some level as well.

For us, the important distinction between the field and the classroom is one of position. No matter how much professors may try to distance themselves from the university structure; no matter the effort to democratize the classroom, etc. they are always in the position to evaluate and assess. The duties of the professor are then rather straightforward: the one who is seen as possessing expert knowledge is more or less expected to measure others by this body of expertise. Said differently, others in academia we have spoken to have argued that the professor may just be little more than a hired cop that ultimately disciplines through rewards and punishments (i.e. the professor as proselyte of theory becomes the fervent proselytizer**).** Pedagogical techniques have developed in this context. Perhaps all this is less true for the qualitative research engage in the ethnographic enterprise. While this is not a defense against inevitable process of interpretation (and evaluation), the default position of the ethnographer, and here we emphasize 'ideally', is the one who is taught, the student, the child, etc.

Moreover, while the ethnographer is the one who is taught, professors, of course, must demonstrate 'getting it' (cultural competency), in some sort of immediate way, if they want their interlocutors to continue talking to them**.** We are certainly not arguing that the ethnographer can fully suspend ethnocentrism or neutralize one's 'natural attitude', or that textual interpretation is not some kind of assessment /evaluation in itself (no matter how much voice of the other is included). Rather it is to say that we find the qualitative techniques developed for the field more useful for thinking about pedagogy and not vice versa. The methods of the ethnographer may allow the professor an opportunity to step out of academic discourse – or, better yet, to have one foot in and one foot out of the university – and thus be seen as more suitable for the process of reflection.[6] Also for these reasons, we caution those who may be eager to import ethnographic techniques to reflect on pedagogy in some kind of wholesale manner without considering the broader issues that surround it, the broader discourses that constitute it, and the unique intersubjective relationships that characterize the endeavor. These two basic points are reflected in some way in the techniques we introduce below.

Techniques for Reflection

The qualitative techniques we describe below not only have helped us better understand our own pedagogies and the effects they create (as well as other dynamics), but has allowed us to practice and strengthen our grasp of qualitative techniques in a more experimental and unconstrained way. Patrick starts first with some methods that he has found useful for reflection when teaching larger lecture format courses, which ends with his discussion of teaching assistants. Overall, his approach to reflecting on pedagogy is marked by openness and exploration. This is due in part to his status as a beginning instructor, his knack for exploring qualitative research techniques, and his appreciation for psychoanalysis. Eileen has developed techniques that hone in on themes that have emerged from years of teaching graduates courses. While she still maintains a productive openness to pedagogy and to student feedback, her approach to the process of reflection can be characterized as semi-structured, as reflected in the end of the semester questionnaire that she discusses, and in a manner that would be anticipated after years of refining and thinking about her craft.

Deferring Understanding

After reading several qualitative technique manuals for a course I taught last semester I was left a bit surprised by the broad silence on the topic of listening. Spradley's (1979) classic book on ethnographic interviewing makes no direct reference to general strategies of listening. Similarly, Fetterman's (1998) only hints at what kind of listening may be suitable for ethnographers during his brief discussion of ethnography's debt to phenomenology. Other texts can be include here as well (e.g., Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). While many pick-up on the kind of listening strategies compatible with the basic goals of ethnography (whether it's through texts, mentors, or just doing it), it has become my impression after speaking with students and thinking about my own experiences with learning research methods that it merits more attention. Hence, to challenge students in my methods course I created an assignment designed to encourage students to explore their own ways of listening.

I often do these assignments with them since I enjoy experimenting with different listening strategies whenever I can. One general strategy that I have found indispensible to students, myself, and for the process of reflecting on pedagogy can be called 'deferring understanding'. This idea takes its start from Freud's notion of 'free-floating' attention practiced by the analyst in clinical encounter (Lacan & Fink, 2006:394-95), secondary texts on Lacanian psychoanalysis (Fink, 1999, 2007), and anthropological texts that aim to forge dialogues between psychoanalysis and anthropology (Kracke & Villela, 2004). After speaking with students and reading their assignments, and being in academia for many years myself, I don't hesitate to say that so often in academia there is great pressure to analyze, understand, see the connections, and confer meaning upon another's discourse in an immediate and clever way. The pressure to 'get it' – to display immediate competency is great. When it comes time to conduct open ethnographic interviews this standard emphasis usually creates conflict, reduces the space for speech, and oftentimes places meaning where it shouldn't be.

In a large lecture course I find it absolutely imperative to defer my understanding of student discourses. This is often quite challenging because during the two 50 minute lectures of every week I'm the one doing all the talking, making the connections on the fly, analyzing, guiding the inquiry, and so on. When a student arrives at my office or addresses me after class, for whatever reason, there is often the expectation that I will continue this by breaking into a mini-lecture after a few opening words. Not only am I more interested in hearing more from students (which is often difficult to do in a large lecture), but I want to demonstrate to them just what anthropological methods look like in person, in our actual exchange. This requires asking the spontaneous or unexpected question, remaining silent for longer than expected, and postponing the immediate imposition of meaning to help break past the standard rehearsals, both the students' and my own. Following these techniques have lead to some unexpected opportunities. These opportunities generally include the chance learn profound insights from my students and the chance to probe deeper into what happens in the classroom, including my role there.

Jottings and Journals

I make regular use of jottings and journals during the semester. Following the insights by Emerson et al. (1995) and Sanjek (1990) I make jottings on student comments, teaching assistant meetings, the off-hand comment, my performances, and a plethora of other observations and interactions. I am not at all systemic with the jottings I make; I may go a few weeks jotting very little or I may find myself spending most of the day writing about one interaction. Content can range from the truly practical to broader philosophical issues, and expectedly, much in between. The biggest challenge is often finding the motivation to transform barely legible scratch notes into fieldnotes (or simply, a more fluid narrative). Nonetheless, after the semester I typically have about 25-30 pages of written-up jottings. I use these writing to explore a forever changing set of questions. Recently, these questions have centered on how students express their thoughts when the mode of knowledge production I choose deviates from cultural expectations and how to better know about the intersubjective effects of my pedagogy. When personal journaling is combined with general ethnographic interviewing and observation techniques and the mode of listening delineated above, the techniques form the foundation of my pedagogical reflections. It also ensures that I learn for my experimentations.

Formal Teacher Evaluations

A large lecture format course precludes the chance to get to know every student. Little surprise here. However, in order to provide the opportunity for every student to be heard in some way I make use of formal teacher evaluations. The general format of these evaluations hasn't changed much since I was an undergraduate. It requests general information about the student ('Student Characteristics'), takes them through a series of predetermined questions (on 'Enthusiasm', 'Learning' , and other topics) and then offers a section where students can write a response to a question formulated by the professor. For this last section I typically have students write any comments that they may have about their experience in the course, reminding them that while I appreciate their bubble-filling-out efforts and the numbers that are derived from them, their comments are generally more valuable. The range of written responses has been impressive: I get comments on my hair, clothing, looks, and idiosyncrasies…to comments on my perceived philosophical orientation. By and large, these comments have helped my fine tune my pedagogy and think more deeply about my performances. Even more, they have reaffirmed a conviction that I have had for some time: that education is much more than the dispassionate transmission of objective knowledge. There are important intersubjective relationships that must be considered and one cannot dissolve them be simply pretending to be the bearer of a neutral knowledge.

Expectedly, many of the student comments have encouraged me to all reflect on a series of broader ideas, such as transference, identification, knowledge, authority, and legitimization.

There are many tales to the numbers present on the evaluations. Said differently, there are many way to find patterns and account for shifts in the numbers on the final tally form I receive in my mailbox (hopefully, I'm not the only person to think that Spring and Fall semester impact the final tally). After teaching Anthropology 101 for three semesters straight I have 658 tabulated student responses to the predetermined questions on the teacher evaluations. Some figures I'm initially drawn to include the total number of responses (since it gives me an indication of how many students are attending the last few lectures of the course – i.e. have I maintained their interest, or, more precisely, encourage their own desire for knowledge) and the questions listed under 'enthusiasm' (hopefully an infectious enthusiasm not for the aggressive mastery of the object of knowledge, but for an enthusiasm for the pleasure of learning).

Both of these numbers however can fluctuate somewhat drastically depending on whether the evaluations are administered before or after the lecture review session, and by their proximity to finals week. There are two surprising patterns worth mentioning: (1) Despite continually experimenting with course design, material presentation, etc. my calculated averages for a few sections display little statistical variation (e.g. 'organization' and 'breadth'). Maybe it's simply the case that I'm not experimenting as much as I thought, or deeply value clear presentation and the 'survey' nature of the course. Yet the only firm conclusion that I can offer is that I need more qualitative information to address why some categories stay the same despite some significant changes to course design. (2) The highest averages I ever received came from the first time a taught Anthropology 101. I admitted above to teaching narrowly at this time, and it is of little surprise to me that students, perhaps feeling at the time that they have gained control and mastery of the course's object of knowledge, reported favorably in the 'learning' and 'overall comparison' sections. I'm still thinking about this pattern and wonder if it links in some way to an increasing demand for training (or the infiltration of neoliberal ideals, or both?). Again, more qualitative data would be valuable here.

Teaching assistants

I've long been attracted to the idea of collaborative ethnography in particular (e.g., Lassiter, 2005) and collaborative academic activities in general. Minimally, this has led me to look favorably upon my weekly meetings with the teaching assistants (TAs) that I'm assigned every semester. Not only have I've been fortunate to have a nearly perfect group of TAs every semester, who do so many unsung activities, many have been enthusiastic about the idea of reflecting on pedagogy, both on their own and in assisting me. Making a conscious effort to collectively reflect on pedagogy allows everyone to engage differently with each other, the students, and a chance to use qualitative techniques often and in fruitful ways. We had some amazing discussions concerning pedagogical technique, student interactions, and course material. It goes without saying that the feedback I have received has been invaluable when it comes to reflecting on my own pedagogy. Also, when it comes to collaborative efforts for reflecting on pedagogy my dinner-time conversations with my mother have truly been one of a kind and instrumental in formulating and revising so many ideas on pedagogy.

Nervousness Again

As in Patrick's case I (Eileen) am nervous when I start my class of 20 to 22 students. I think to myself what will it be like to teach this class? Who are they expecting? Who am I expecting? I have taught at a small University on the Southside of Chicago for over 20 years. I have thought about pedagogy and what the story entails for many years. I reflect on the questions I gave to my students for the past three semesters in my graduate adolescent class. I ask myself the question: Do I participate too much? Do I allow their voices to be heard? Do I understand how their online experience allows them to know themselves and others better so that when they get to class they are able to share themselves in a deeper way? My viewpoint of the pedagogy is defined by a stance of the teacher as facilitator. In other words, as the students develop a relationship with me in the class and with each other, they attend to the knowledge issues in a way that creates more meaning for them. This is certainly different from Patrick's 400 students! We often talked about students and teaching over the super table. I would say as a veteran teacher I can only be amazed at the insights Patrick has provided as a new teacher. He has continually pointed out to me that the structure of the class sets one free to be creative in the class[6]. At the end of each class I attempt to ferret out those issues that would assist me in being a more intentional teacher in the next class in regard to the relationships established.

The questions I asked at the end of the semester were to ascertain if they felt a sense of empowerment as proposed by Friere (1970) in which he sees pedagogy as a sense of empowerment and ownership. I felt these questions were important not only in the aspect of hearing the student's voice in the classroom and taking ownership of the statements but also to encourage the students who will eventually teach in our schools to clarify their understanding of adolescent issues. The questions posed are as follows:

1. *Please describe your participation in class. Why is participation important?*
2. *Please describe your writing experience. Did the online emphasis help you write about your understanding of adolescent development in a deeper way?*
3. *To what extent do you contribute to our class discussions? Specifically, do you grow in your dispositions to actively, and sensitively, explore the understanding of your classmates*?

In speaking to the students before the class began each semester I would ask the students how they had participated in their classes in the past (remember I have only 20 students). Many indicated that they were not invited to participate in class due to time constraints and the amount of information that needed to be covered. My concern for them was that they were going to be teachers and in that profession they would need to develop a relationship with themselves, speak clearly and effectively to their own students and become familiar with the expression of their thoughts and ideas concerning adolescents. In the self-evaluation students wrote:
"I am more of a listener than a participator. When I feel the need to speak I will do so when the time is right." (2)
"I expressed my thoughts without being called on. I think my participation in class was above average." (5) "I process information better when I participate in class and when I hear what others think about the information under discussion." (10)

The purpose of the second question was to test the online environment as to the discussion of the material to be read for class before the class took place. I posed questions about the readings for the class and had each student respond to the questions and then respond to one other person's posting. This became a much more vital aspect to the teaching and learning than I had imagined. In the second question students wrote:

"Yes. I was able to, or maybe encouraged to, think more reflectively, knowing that I was submitting it to an online forum. It was also freeing…I was never forced by the conventional confines of writing. I do my best thinking with a word processor, since I can revise and edit in process." (57)
"As I write I must rethink and re-evaluate the experience while trying to explain it. Talk about growth!" (9)
"I enjoy the online assignments. Blackboard is an excellent tool. I also like seeing other student's point of view and opinion on the assignments." (14)
"I liked doing the writings online. I was able to read other students entries and see how they were similar and different from my responses." (15)
"Other people's responses helped to thoughtfully prepare a response for class discussion." (17)
"I like using Blackboard because I get to share my thoughts and get to see how my classmates are thinking." (23)
The purpose of question 3 was to develop a sense of ownership of the thoughts and understandings the students had developed as a result of their readings and discussion. I also wanted to focus on the students' attention to others in the class in which they developed relationships with one another. When replying to question three the students stated:
"The assignments are all relevant to the understanding of the course readings and through the discussion we were able to hear other interpretations."
"I really think our class was like an oral paper. In each class we would discuss theories giving personal examples and build off of each other's experiences." (27)
In the following statement the student is also concerned about the understanding developed by the professor:
"I believe that it helps to observe perspectives of the individual. When I responded to the various topic questions, books, videos, etc. I wanted to provide my interpretations. It also helps the professor to observe whether the students are grasping the content of materials presented."
In another incident a student gives validation to the meaningfulness of the class work:
"Everything in class correlated to one another. Everything we did had a meaning and connection to what we were doing in class." (30)
"Most of the time when I write I sometimes find myself more engaged in the readings. It was also helpful to read my classmates reflections. They may have reflected upon things differently than I did which opened my eyes to so much more." (43)

These three questions illustrated the paramount purpose of the course which was to develop a relationship with me and themselves and each other in order to include their voices in the class and to assist them in becoming more confident and competent in their work of understanding the issues of adolescence. During the class the pedagogy shifted from being singularly focused on the teacher to one of sharing information with all in a dynamic and meaningful way.

Some significance

One of the issues that most surprised and thrilled me was the online aspect of the course. I did not realize how significant this was until the second or third class when I realized how well the class discussions were going. The students continually reported how beneficial the online was to them in regard to understanding others better. It aided the pedagogy in a way that further developed the relationships established in the class. The relationships became deeper and more meaningful in a shorter amount of time. One student related that in past classes she was not sure about an assignment but did it. Then when she got to class, she felt that it was done all wrong but with the assignments online she felt more confident in what she did as she could read others work and learn from them. I also felt that the students completed their work with a sense that they desired to speak about the readings in class. Not only were they prepared for class but also they wanted to share their insights with their classmates. They had a sense of competence and confidence that they did not have in other classes. The level of participation arose and I became more of a facilitator of the group rather than a disseminator of information.

Conclusion

Our chief task for this paper was to elucidate how the processes of reflection are intermingled with, and colored by, several broader issues in higher education. While we see the notion of 'fetishistic disavowal' central to reflection, most of our discussions were focused on posing questions and attempts to engender dialogue, rather than offering some kind of final word. It is also admitted that we are just touching the tip of the iceberg here – that there are plenty other issues that merit contemplation when it comes to pedagogy and higher education. We then shifted our attention to qualitative techniques and the process of reflection. Patrick's discussion took a more open form of reflection which centered listening, journaling, and thinking about teacher evaluations. Eileen offered a small qualitative analysis of her Adolescent Development class and demonstrates the importance of eventually semi-structuring one's reflection on pedagogy.

Lastly, an important point: if the generation of knowledge doesn't guarantee any kind of change in educational practice or policy (i.e. see the fetishistic disavowal above), what's the point of engaging in the process of reflection and generating new knowledge on one's pedagogy? Again, we see standard Enlightenment endeavors and the generation of self knowledge as fundamentally necessary for thinking about pedagogy. We also wager that when this kind of self knowledge is paired with a psychoanalytical approach to pedagogy it becomes even more useful. Particular concepts from Jacques Lacan that seem important here are 'Discourse of the Analyst' and 'Traversing the Fantasy'. Since we are still thinking about these concepts and their implications for pedagogy they were not developed in this paper. It is acknowledged that mentioning these concepts at the end of the paper may seem little more than a convenient and shameless exercise in jargon-dropping. We hope this is not totally the case, for we find the concepts of great value when it comes to understanding pedagogy and intend to develop them in future papers.

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Notes

[1] This subtitle reveals that I (Patrick) find Lacanian psychoanalysis, as developed by Slavoj Žižek, a privileged (not a meta- [see Fink 1998]) discourse for understanding pedagogical discourses and practices and the processes of reflection. The impetus for applying the idea of the fetishistic disavowal or split to education comes from conversations with Andrew Cousins, a mentor and my main interlocutor on all things psychoanalytical, and a text by Tony Myers (2003). Also, if the title creates some offense – i.e. applying psychoanalytical concepts to education, accusations of pathologizing, etc. – rest assured that there are far worse things to say about education than merely applying psychoanalytical categories to it in one's analysis.

[2] The video is in two parts. (Part 1) - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wW5JMc12vs (Part 2) - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vGKD7Ftyts&feature=related

[3] Of course the lingering question is, "What would a truly emancipatory pedagogical discourse look like?" I've always been attracted to Žižek's notion of subversive conformism (see Žižek 1997). Rather than parodying and distancing oneself from the realm of university norms and procedures, a truly subversive act might start by taking the letter of the Law seriously – assuming the Duty fully – and thus subverting from within. Taking the rules more seriously than everyone else might have subversive/transformative potential, but, as Žižek warns, it also might already be part of the game. The Discourse of the Analyst, as elucidated by Lacan, may provide another fruitful path into thinking about pedagogy in the university (see Lacan 2006). I've only begun to think how the teacher-student relationship may parallel the analyst-analysand relationship. It seems rather clear at the outset, and contrary to what may be typically viewed as a psychoanalytically oriented pedagogy, that one in not required to pledge allegiance to anti-foundationalism or think that the best thing that a teacher can do for her students is get out of the way (i.e. let their inner-experience prevail).

[4] It seems Žižek discusses the logic of the forced choice in nearly all of his texts. One immediate reference that I can find comes from *The Plague of Fantasies* (27-30).

[5] Or maybe the lesson is that students are not as postmodern as initially thought; that the postmodern university is really just a university that exists mostly in the minds of some professors…etc.

[6] We're reminded of Žižek's comments on discipline as a necessary condition for freedom (Žižek 2007:22-27; Žižek 1997: 109-111).