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The power of critical thinking in learning and teaching. An interview with Professor Stephen D. Brookfield.

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Abstract

In this wide-ranging interview, we discuss continuities and watersheds of Professor Stephen Brookfield's world-renowned and massive contributions to Higher Education and Adult Education. While Brookfield's work demonstrates a remarkable continuity in terms of multi-angled perspectives on critical thinking and democratisation, there are also some notable changes through the years, such as a turn to self-directed learning (in the 1980s), a focus on power dynamics (in the 1990s), a theoretical turn (heavily influenced by Critical Theory, at the turn of the century) and a turn towards the importance of race relations (in the noughties). The extensive interview includes discussions of Brookfield's four lenses (students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory and personal experience); the power of failure; credibility and authenticity as key criteria of being a good teacher; the inevitable omnipresence of power and an open, pragmatic approach to learning and teaching methods; the importance of feedback and assessment's key role as learning; use and abuse of technology in the classroom; MOOCs not being a disruptive innovation; Higher Education's potential as an agent of liberation and prevailing counter-forces; how educational institutions can encourage skillful and critically-reflected teaching; and the connection between art and pedagogy.

Since beginning his teaching career in 1970, Stephen Brookfield has worked in England, Canada, Australia, and the U.S., teaching in a variety of adult, community, organisational and higher education settings (the latter include Harvard University and Columbia University). In his endeavour to help adults learn to think critically about the dominant ideologies they have internalised, Professor Brookfield has written, co-written or edited 19 books on adult learning, teaching, critical thinking, discussion methods, critical theory and teaching race.



Figure 1: Stephen Brookfield.

1. An introductory overview: continuities and watersheds

Eds.: Professor Brookfield, Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview! You have been an astonishingly prolific writer (also winning multiple awards – like the Cyril O. Houle World Award for Literature in Adult Education no less than six times, amongst other prizes). You wrote 19 books and countless articles. Could you provide us with an overview and walk us through your oeuvre? Are there any watersheds or milestones? Any major changes and any major continuities in your views over time?

SB: I think there are a couple of continuities, and I'm mostly thinking about future projects rather than the past. But I think there's always an interest in how adults learn to think critically in some way, how they become aware of their assumptions, how they deal with an exposure to alternative views of the world, and I've been interested in that from a civic viewpoint. How do adults learn to recognise dominant ideology and become aware of how some of those ideologies move in them?

And so that's the sort of critical theory strand I've explored theoretically, and then I've had a more practical strand looking at critical thinking. I've written a couple of books on developing critical thinking and teaching for critical thinking which sometimes deal with those political matters, but also deal with a whole range of instances of critical thinking in other life categories. And then I've also been interested in critical thinking by teachers which is the critically reflective teacher strand. So I think that that interest in criticality – what it is, how it's learnt, how do you foster it – has been something that I'm very interested in, and right now my last book was on teaching race, and my next book is on creating an anti-racist white identity.

So I'm really looking at how we think critically about racial identity and the multiplicity of ways people experience life in the world. So that's one theme. And then I think the other

theme kind of comes from my community development background which is where I started off in adult education; generally, I think, with the process of democratising different environments. So, educationally, I've become very interested in discussion methods as a particular methodology which often claims to be inclusive, to decentre power, to give everybody a chance, an equal chance to participate, to hear all voices and so on and so forth. So I'm interested in how discussion can do that but also, how it can work against that, so, I've been in a lot of what Ralph Patterson, a philosopher of adult education in England in the '70s, called "counterfeit discussions" (1979). Counterfeit discussions are those where people are talking to each other and it looks as though democracy is in play but in fact, it's being manipulated and power differences are surfacing constantly in the room between participants and also between leader and participants.

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So, I think, that's been a second strand, figuring out what democracy looks like and how discussion in particular, plays itself out as a methodology to democratise learning and maybe, thinking about it, there's a third stream, having to do with power and the responsible exercise of teacher authority and power. I began my career feeling as if my responsibility was completely to decentre my own authority and almost remove myself from the classroom and not really be a significant influence in there and just let the students get on with it. And that's kind of the area in which I did my PhD back in the '70s in independent adult learning. I was very interested in self-directed learning for a while. And then I think, as I got a little bit more experienced, I realised that, well, your body is always of significance in the class, you always do have some power, the question is: is that being exercised responsibly and supportively and authoritatively? Or is it being exercised in a more authoritarian, haphazard, impositional kind of way?

And I guess, just to finish off, that circles back to the first theme on critical thinking. I think some of the most significant critical thinking is resisted severely because we sense that if we take this effort to think critically about our assumptions in a serious way, it's going to lead to some significant change, it's going to complicate our lives for us, it's going to throw up a lot of problems that we're going to have to deal with. So I've been in a lot of workshops around race, and participants are reluctant to engage with the topic. And I think part of that reluctance comes from a sense that this is going to be too discomforting, too dangerous and cause too many problems. So I have to use my authority to insist that that happened and in a lot of critical thinking environments, I find I'm using my power to push people along and I have to judge when moving them into a new challenging area is going to be difficult. But also when I

sense we need to do this and people say 'we don't want to do this, we don't think race is a problem, we don't need to look at whiteness and white identity' and I say, 'no, we do and here's why'. So I guess, the third strand is I'm interested in power dynamics and the way power moves around the situation and that includes teacher power as well as power dynamics amongst the students.

And in terms of watersheds, I'm like everyone, I'm in a process of constant evolution. I think my turn to becoming more interested in race happened a few years ago in a specific time living in the United States, where this has become so much more of an issue. And it's certainly being heightened by Trump's election but I've been writing on this for 12 years I think, so that turn in the last decade was significant for me.

I think the turn when I started to recognise the influence of power which was in the '90s was a big one for me as I moved away from focusing on self-direction in the '80s to more into power dynamics, that was a big turn for me. I had a theoretical turn when I decided to stop all my practical stuff and spend five years just writing a theoretical book on critical theory and that was a wonderful experience because I felt like I really got to know that body of theoretical work from the inside out. It was like taking a third or fourth degree almost, giving myself five years to immerse myself in that and producing a book on it. So that clarified a lot for me.

So I think those are some of the turns that have happened. The practitioner-theorist divide is not really, in some ways, a helpful one. But at heart I've always seen myself as a practitioner, my self-identity is as a teacher and as a practitioner. So a lot of what I write is driven by things that are happening to me in class, and my teaching agenda is to help people think more critically in multiple contexts. And I teach a lot of leadership courses where I'm teaching people to be critically reflective about leadership, to think about what it means to work in a just and ethical way, as a leader. So the problems that arise from trying to get people to think and act more critically really drive the writing, so it's a case of writing coming from practice, most of the time for me. I think the only exception was *The Power of Critical Theory* book.

Eds.: That's extremely helpful. I [JR] actually just finished reading your *The Power of Critical Theory for Adult Learning and Teaching* (2005a) book today, and I was intrigued by a lot of things. So first let me tell you it's definitely one of my favourite books! You can probably still hear from my accent that I'm from Germany. I used to study Sociology in the '80s, so reading a lot of the Frankfurt School stuff was obviously part of my journey, too, and I've never found a book that summarises and also synthesises it so clearly. So it was like a homecoming for me to read the book and at the same time, you have these extra chapters about gender and race. Just now you said this is one of your watersheds that race has become very important. And I also found what you write about bell hooks, Angela Davis, also Cornel West, most intriguing because I wasn't really familiar with their work. I was telling my colleague that thanks to you, I will probably need to buy a new bookshelf because there are so many interesting works that I've come across while reading this particular book (*The Power of Critical Theory*) and also

some of your other fabulous works of course.

2. The four lenses (students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory, and personal experience)

Eds.: In *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, you write that the four lenses of critical reflection are "students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory, and personal experience" (2017, p. vii). Could you tell us a little bit more how we – Eric teaches Economics, I [JR] teach quite a few Management and Business subjects – as teachers can make good use of the lenses? I think in the book *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (2017), you're also expressing some scepticism on some of the mandatory critical reflection and I think we could probably also be sceptical about the absolute value of student evaluations that in our context are quite important. Then you're also talking about colleagues and the personal experience and of course, when it comes to the theory, just now you said that you had this five-year sabbatical. Could you perhaps also recommend some of your own books and some of the books of others that could be particularly useful for the theoretical part?

SB: So I think those four lenses have been of enduring help to me and the first edition of that book came out in the mid-'90s so that's almost 25 years ago now, and I still find the students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, theory and personal experience categorisation to be very helpful because I use all of them in my own practice. Probably the one I get most questions about is the lens of students' eyes because there is so much emphasis on evidence-based teaching in the United States and, I guess, also in other countries and so, for me as a teacher, I use the Critical Incident Questionnaire in pretty much everything that I do which is a tool I talk about in that book.

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I use social media a lot. I use the back channel chat tool, it's a little social media platform that allows you to get immediate feedback anonymously from students. So in every one of my classes, I have a backchannelchat.com feed up so students can post questions, make observations, and also sometimes I'll ask questions. Like maybe in the middle of a class, I'll ask what's the most difficult concept we've considered today or what would you like me to re-explain or what would be helpful for me to give some more examples of. And I'll say 'just reply on backchannel chat', and within about 30 seconds I've got lots of different questions, so it's part of my attempt to democratise the classroom and make students less fearful about asking questions that they may feel are too dumb to be raised. So the students' eyes is crucial and I use that in my leadership work as well. I'm constantly exploring ways of getting anonymous feedback from those that I'm supervising or working with and that lens of students' eyes / followers' eyes / colleagues' eyes really helps me get a sense of whether my actions are well grounded in an accurate

analysis of what's going on. So it's really just that way of checking assumptions as the basic idea. It's applying critical thinking to the practice of your teaching, so that's the one that gets most attention.

The others, though, I'm extremely interested in. I like peer teaching in terms of the colleagues' perceptions lens. I love peer teaching, the appointment I'm going to after this is to meet with my colleague in one of the classes I'm teaching this semester. We're co-teaching it, and each week we meet to debrief what happened last week or this week and then to plan next week. So because team teaching for me is where you are both in the room, you both plan, you both evaluate. It's not 'I'll take this week and you take next week' where we put everything together. And I feel that having a built-in colleague lens is incredibly helpful because that person helps me debrief or points out things I've not noticed, challenges some of the assumptions that I have, and the interpretations that I bring as regarding the class went well or went badly or my interpretations of a particular incident. So I'm a very strong advocate of peer teaching, and generally of teacher conversations and teacher reflection groups.

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The lens of personal experience. I learn a lot by just asking myself questions like 'what is it that stops me from participating in a discussion?' So if I'm setting up a discussion or a meeting, one of the first things I'll do is, say, 'well, let me think of my experiences of these kind of events in the past, and let me think of the ones where I felt most alienated and most disconnected, what was it about those meetings that really annoyed me or distanced me?' And then I identify the factors and I try and think through, well, 'how would I make sure that I do the opposite of everything that's really annoyed me in the past?' So that's helpful and the other thing about my personal experience is that I'm a strong introvert, so I always think through an introvert's lens, and as I'm thinking about student participation, particularly when you're using something like a discussion approach, I always think, well, how do we create space for quieter students to have time to think through what they say, how do we make sure we don't privilege rapid speech all the time. That sort of thing.

And then the theoretical lens is very important and I argue in the book that the theory-practice divide is a false dichotomy; that really all practice is theoretically-informed by generalised understandings of what works best in this particular context, and I think that a theory essentially is your own attempt to create a generalizable analysis that is a guide to action. And some of that comes from experience but we're all caught in our own experience and so, opening myself up to different theoretical lenses is incredibly interesting. So around race, for example, my own white identity gives me some insight into how whites experience teaching and learning about this, and that is helpful and important. But I have no real experiential awareness – I have a cognitive awareness of how people of colour experience this – so I'm very interested in reading a lot of direct testimonies in terms of how people experience racism in the United States and

particularly in Higher Education, in classrooms, in staffrooms, in student associations so on. So that has been really helpful to me. There are a couple of books that came out recently. One is called *White Fragility* by Robin Diangelo (2019) that's had a big impact on a lot of people, and it's been a useful text, and they look at the ways in which whites managed to avoid really dealing with race, they think they are but they're not. Another book is called *Good White People* by Shannon Sullivan (2014) which looks at the same phenomenon.

The theory-practice divide is a false dichotomy.

I think another area which I have a lot of insight is from developmental psychology, particularly models of cognitive development, the ways in which people are, as they are moving into dealing with ambiguity in adulthood, learning to think more contextually, more critically, about situations and events, their experience. There is some really interesting literature, it's in an area that is generally called post-formal cognition, Michael Bisesi (1982) has done some interesting stuff on dialectical thinking. Kathleen King (2009) has done some stuff on how we develop ever more complicated intellectual frameworks and how difficult that is for people as they move into adulthood.

And then, a recent theoretical area I've become very interested in is the use of narratives as a teaching tool, particularly a teaching tool to model critical thinking, so there's been an awful lot of interesting stuff done on how using autobiographical disclosure of your own efforts to think more critically is a good strategic teaching tool to draw people in. So I actually teach a course on leadership narratives, I'm teaching it right now, and we look at the work from a lot of different areas. Stephen Denning's work on narrative leadership (2011) which comes from a business perspective is very interesting to me; and Robert Nash's work on scholarly personal narratives (2019).

So those are just some of the theoretical efforts that have helped me, and I read theory essentially to help me understand the problems I'm dealing with, so I don't tend to read it for the sake of becoming more theoretically informed. It's more, alright, 'I'm trying to understand why people are so resistant to doing something that I feel will be in their own best interests. Where does this resistance come from? How can I slide past it, what's an appropriate response to it? Am I fundamentally wrong in my project of trying to do that, is the resistance justified?' So those kinds of practical problems are the things that lead me into reading theory, because if I have a better analysis of what I'm dealing with, then I think I can make more informed decisions as a teacher, as a leader, as a practitioner.

Eds.: I [JR] think I need to probably buy another bookshelf. I find it very hard to believe, because you are so youthful and full of energy, but is it true that you have almost 50 years' experience as a teacher?

SB: Yes, I started teaching in 1970 so, 2020 will be my 50th anniversary.

3. “Don’t trust what you’ve just read” and the power of failure

Eds.: In your book *The Skillful Teacher*, my favourite maxim is the last one, “Don’t Trust What You’ve Just Read” (Brookfield, 2015, p. 276), and I [JR] think this is also what Marcuse said, that we always have to be critical about Critical Theory and so we should never be unquestioning in our approach. I must say I was quite surprised when in one of your books, you were sharing that you were not exactly a top student and that you were exam-phobic, if I remember correctly. And you were also saying that when you started being an adjunct lecturer that you had nobody to talk to, and you only carried on because you had to pay the rent.

SB: That’s exactly correct. I hated it, I couldn’t eat as the day started and sometimes I would throw up beforehand, I was so nervous, and I was told not to go into teaching because of my introverted and shy nature. So over the years I’ve learned to perform as an extrovert, but my favourite time is to be by myself, writing, or reading or thinking. So I’m lucky in that I’ve managed to have a career in which that is valued, the publication is valued. But I do feel that the fact I was not a good student and had a history of failing exams has really helped me be a much better teacher than if I had sailed through, because experientially, I have some knowledge what it feels like to struggle, to feel like an imposter as a student, and one of the reasons for writing the *Critical Theory* book (2005a) was because critical theory really intimidated me and I felt like I couldn’t understand 99% of what I read.

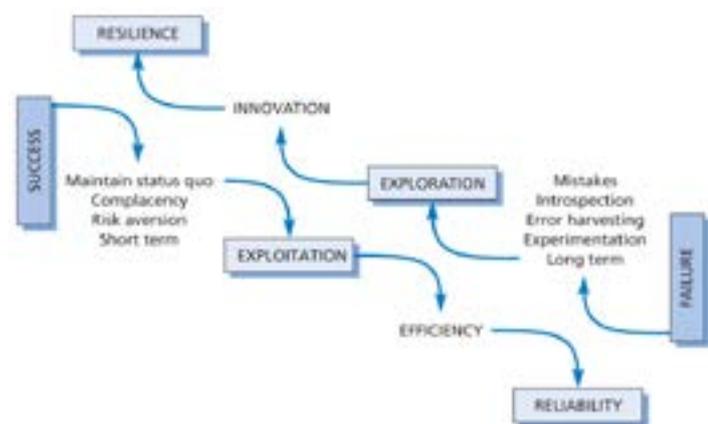


Figure 2: Power of failure (Jashapara, 2010).

When I finally got through to what I felt was some meaning for me, it was always worth it. So I thought, well, I need to write a book that does that for other people and I think that if I have any skill in interpreting theory in an accessible way, that comes from my own struggles with theory. If I found theory immediately comprehensible, I would probably be talking in a theoretical frame using the discourse and jargon of that area and wouldn’t realise that I was just flying above a lot of people’s understanding. So the fact that I struggle to take exams has given me some insight into how students struggle with standardised curricula, standardised forms of assessments; the fact that I struggle as an introvert to participate, has given me some understanding how to arrange classrooms and meetings that I run and workshops that I do to help people participate; and the fact that I

struggle with theory, I think, has helped me become a better interpreter of theory. So I think that that history has been really helpful to me. I’m convinced about that.

Eds.: I [JR] find that very hard to believe that you found it so difficult. But what I also sometimes share with my students is some of my own failures and then I also tell them it was actually very useful because if you are always very successful, the learning experience is not quite as powerful because when you are successful, you have kind of figured it out, how to be very good in exams, to use that example, then you just repeat and you play it safe and you become very efficient as a result of that. Whereas if you encounter failure, it’s painful, and then it will lead to introspection, and it will eventually lead to innovation and you will also become very resilient along the way. So I give them some examples from my own life where I lost a lot of money on the stock market and things like that, and it has made me a much better investor along the way, I hope.

4. Credibility and authenticity as key criteria of being a good teacher

Eds.: One of our colleagues (who is not here with us this evening, or this morning), when he conducts teacher training, he actually always quotes you from your book *The Skillful Teacher* about credibility and authenticity as perhaps the two most important characteristics of being a good teacher. Could you tell us more about this and how this is experienced by the students?

SB: Yes. The research for *The Skillful Teacher* was, gosh, initially way back, I think I wrote the first edition in 1990, so that’s nearly 30 years old now, but it’s gone through two editions and the most recent was 2015, I think. But that focus on credibility and authenticity has remained across all three editions. That comes initially from a lot of secondary research on how students experience teachers and then interviews with as many of my own students as I could arrange, focus groups and other interviews with, way, way back when I did that first edition. And it’s carried over into my study into leadership where I would say that credibility and authenticity, that same necessary dynamic and presence of the two, is just as applicable in leadership practices as in teaching.

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So credibility is this sense that people have trust in your authority, they have a sense that we’re with someone who knows what they’re doing, and it can be, I think, observed in multiple ways. I get often asked by young colleagues who are just starting out, and it’s their first course and they say, well, ‘I don’t have credibility with the students because it’s the first time I’ve taught’. And I say, ‘well, you might not have a lot of past experience, but you have the ability to articulate a rationale for why you’re doing what you’re doing, to explain to the students each of the steps that you’re taking in class that week, that day, to explain the ways in which the curriculum is sequenced, why you

chose the books that you did, for students, what the assignments that you are asking them to do is designed to achieve, how it's designed to move their learning along', and so forth. And then when the students ask you 'why are we doing this or why do we need to learn this', you have a well-worked-out answer that you can give so that sense of having thought through a process, of being planned for, is a big part of credibility for students for practitioners who do not have a lot of experience under their belts.

The indicator that is most often mentioned as the indicator of credibility, the way it is built very quickly, is if a question is raised and the instructor, or the leader or the facilitator, is able to respond well in the moment to an obviously unexpected question. If you could do that then people get a sense, well, this person really knows what they're doing. So one of the things I'm very interested in is: how do you create opportunities for people to ask questions? And I'm mostly interested in that because it helps their learning, but one of the side benefits of it is that your credibility can increase quickly if you're with a group who doesn't know you, doesn't have a lot of trust in you, is annoyed at having to be there, like I have to do a lot of mandatory professional development workshops and a lot of people don't want to be there. So someone asked a hostile question and I could respond in the moment in a way that is thoughtful, this shows I have some experience, then I think my credibility rises. So that's credibility.

The authenticity part is the sense people have that they can trust you and I don't think that trust is the same as liking you personally, but they can trust that you are going to be consistent, that you won't say one thing and then do another. The development of trust is getting to know you more as a person, so the use of appropriate autobiographical disclosure is a big part of that. And I always say 'appropriate', you don't come in just talking about yourself for no reason, it always has to be linked to a particular learning activity or objective or process. So having your words and actions be consistent, giving a sense of who you are, making full disclosure about why you're there, and the expectations and the agenda you have and the criteria you're operating, I think all those kind of things build a sense of 'we can trust this person to deal fairly with us', that they're not going to play games, they're not going to pull a fast one, as we say in colloquial English.

And, I think, both of those I find very helpful because as an adult educator, I was very much steeped in the authenticity axis. So in adult education in my diploma studies, when I was a PhD student, we would read a lot of Carl Rogers (1983, 2003), way back in the '70s and '80s, and the importance of non-directive facilitation and unconditional positive regard, and all this supportive stuff. So that's the orientation I came from, and then I realised over time as I got more into practice, that sometimes people were looking to me to do something and to give some suggestions and give some direction, and they needed trust that I as the person in charge sort of knew what he was doing. So I've come over the years to appreciate the importance of being credible as well. So I think you need both and optimally, both are there in a kind of congenial tension with each other.

5. The inevitable omnipresence of power and an open, pragmatic approach to learning and teaching methods

Eds.: I [JR] remember also reading this in your work that you cannot be a fly on the wall, that may have been a nice thought for a while. But we must be realising that we have power and that power is inevitable and that power is always there as Foucault makes it very clear, and that as a result we may as well use that power in a meaningful and good way.

SB: Foucault was very helpful to me in that regard, he was very frustrating because I couldn't understand what he was saying, and then when I finally kept with it and struggled, it really reframed a lot of the ways I did my work and that's when I became much more intentional about saying: 'okay, here is my role here', and because of reading Foucault, I started inserting into my syllabus things like 'here's what you can expect from me'. So it wasn't just 'what I can expect from you', 'it's here's what you can expect from me, here's some of the assumptions I bring into the way that I'm going to be running this class'. So he's a great example of someone who I found frustrating at a theoretical level, but it really has very significantly affected how I do my work.

Eds.: There's so many interesting things you've been saying, but one of the things was that one of the methods is self-directed learning which is very important in Adult Education. And you've obviously written two books on discussion as a way of teaching (Brookfield, 2005b; Brookfield & Preskill, 2016), so I think that is something that is very important to your understanding of how learning and teaching can be done. And I was very amused by your description of the Circle, and we just want to tell you that we really like the Circle because one of our friends, he always does that when he conducts teacher training, and it has created a different feel and a different trust with our local lecturers when he flies in from the U.K. And I think you are also quite positive about the lecture. Some people say 'we should teach as little as possible', but at the same time, a great lecture can still be a fabulous tool?

SB: Yes, I think, in *The Skillful Teacher* (2015), I say that my first core assumption is that when we are trying to decide what good teaching is, all you have to do is say: does this help student learning? So anything that help student learning from my point of view is good teaching and I think as I become more involved in online teaching and now I teach some courses fully online, and instructional design as an area of applied practice has emerged so prominently particularly in online course design. That's been really helpful to me so I ask myself: 'what do I want students to be able to do?' And: 'how do I want them to be able to think as a result of taking this course?' And: 'what ideas do I think are most important they be exposed to, what will help them?'

So starting off with those questions about student learning and then working backward and saying 'okay, so, as I was thinking about design, what kinds of experiences will be most useful in supporting that sort of learning? That's how I run my classes. So I'm very pragmatic, I'm very open to anything. My instinct and inclination is always to go for a discussion-based, more dialogic approach – that's a defining

characteristic for me – but I have realised over the years that, sometimes, moving too quickly into that dynamic is not very helpful. There is no point having students discuss topics they know nothing about. I need to model my own commitment to discussion before I involve other people to be engaged, and that sometimes I'm very interested in good targeted pre-reading. I think pre-reading is very important for a lot of stuff. So I like to use the flipped classroom model sometimes, where students do most of their preparatory work outside and then bring the problems, and then I structure the class around understanding what this stuff is saying. I'm happy to lecture, I do try to keep in mind Donald Bligh's assessment in his book *What's the use of lectures?* (2000) where he estimates, you should be chunking your lectures into 15-minute episodes, so every 15 minutes or so, I try to get the students to do something if I'm in an extended lecture. So, and I used to be a very much a Luddite around online learning, and now, I realise, there are some things that online learning does well. I try to incorporate technology constantly, the use of the backchannel chat feed, for example, now it's a staple of my teaching.

Eds.: That sounds like a really great idea.

SB: So I really feel that I naturally work experientially and pragmatically and by that, I mean pragmatism in the American philosophical tradition which says 'there are multiple ways to meet objectives', 'we constantly have to reflect on experiences', 'experimentation as a basic feature of human existence'. So I'm always switching things up, and really the decisions I make are based on the lens of students' eyes and what I'm learning from the Critical Incident Questionnaire, feedback from backchannel chat which is anonymous, or from after-hours groups or from whatever it is. So yeah, I'm very, I hope, open in my methodology and I think that when you think in a bifurcated way, like 'lecture good, discussion bad; or 'discussion good, lecture bad', it's such a ridiculous over-simplification of the complexity of what you're dealing with, which is people, with an amazing array of different experiences, cognitive structures, wired processing, past histories with schools, culturally and racially learned, traditions of interacting with each other and then viewing the teacher. You know, it's just so complex that we have to be ready to be open to that complexity and be constantly open to change in methodology if necessary.

5. The importance of feedback and assessment's key role is learning

Eds.: Now that we have talked about the multiplicity of methods that we can apply to teaching and learning, we could probably have a similar discussion on assessment. As we were already saying earlier, you had this negative experience with exams by being very nervous and that's actually also my concern. One of the things that I [JR] always tell my students is that I hate exams and that's why I'll try to help them as much as I can, without giving away the questions obviously. So, do you have any views how to create meaningful assessments? I'm sure you do.

SB: Yeah, again, I would start from the learning that you're trying to foster and then work back from that to say, well, 'how best can I give students good formative feedback so that they're making some progress?' They're developing this or that aspect of it. I'm a strong believer in feedback and I guess giving feedback is at the core of assessment. The way I'm thinking of assessment I like to think of assessment as a way of helping learning, so that's the starting point for it. So my inclination is to have as broad a variety of assignment formats available for students as possible. But, if I'm preparing students for a specific occupation, a specific profession where I know they're going to have to do A, B, C, or D, then I also have to design assessment systems that are focusing on the performance of those skills. Let's say, they have to make presentations, they have to give verbal summaries of projects they're working on or their team is working or they have to be able to present new ideas in a crisp and succinct and convincing way, so they're going to have to talk. If I only allow students to submit work where they're writing a poem, or producing an image, or whatever – some more creative ways – then I'm doing them a disservice because I'm not preparing them for the reality of what they're going to be faced with. So some of these assessments would have to be on: how good are you becoming in giving verbal presentations, and giving a crisp and succinct summary of something that you want to do?

If I'm preparing students and I'm thinking specifically about educators and leaders, for their roles, it's possibly not likely that day to day, if you're a school principal, you're going to be asked to write a long theoretical analysis. What you're going to be asked to do is to explain to those that you're supervising why they need to be taking a certain idea or perspective seriously. So as I'm thinking about how do I assess students' theoretical understanding if they're training to be school principals or school superintendents, one of the things I will ask them to do is, alright, 'write something which takes this idea, this concept, that could be something very complicated like hegemony, and then tell me how you would explain this to your colleagues, how you would introduce the item of let's look at the way in which *hegemony* plays itself out in our school? How would you introduce that in a staff meeting?' So I'm really assessing their ability in that assignment to translate from a theoretical level into terms that will make sense to people they are working with. So I think assessment is really informed by whatever it is you are trying to foster.

And I myself, over the years, have moved away from the more traditional ways I grew up with, which is the writing of academic-style papers. And if that's the direction that students are going to go in, then I'm happy to do that if they want to become professors or researchers themselves. But in an applied field, like education, most of them are not going to be doing that. So a lot of my assessments focus around the development of action plans. How would you take some of these ideas and play them out in your school in the next two years; or in your company in the next two years? And I've become much more interested in giving people who are more artistically or aesthetically inclined the opportunity to submit a creative representation of whatever work that they've done, but have that accompanied for me by a briefer narrative explanation.

So instead of writing a 20-page paper, you can present me with a collage or a video stream or an image you designed, or a song you've written, or whatever it is. But then I will need maybe a three to five-page interpretation of how that creative act incorporates the reading that you've done, the insight that you've drawn from the reading, the relevance that you see between your coursework and the area in which you're going to be applying your insights and practice. But of course, accreditation agencies are, increasingly, it seems, at least in the States, narrowing the focus for that. So in my university, everything is driven by the mission, the strategic plan, the specification of learning outcomes, and so outcomes always have to be tied to what the original purposes of the School of Education, the purposes of the syllabus, or the purposes of the particular programme or the department has.

And so for me, the interesting challenge is: 'how do you experiment with a range of creative formats, but be sure that you can link those formats to the purposes of the plan that we're all agreed?' So if I'm using creative representation, my personal preference would be *not* to ask for a five-page explanation or summary of it because it sort of goes against the whole logic of using a creative act. But then, if an accreditation team comes in, they go to my course, they pull out an assignment and they see a collage that the student has done with no real interpretation. Then I'll get hammered for not being rigorous and systematic in tying learning outcomes to the strategic plan. So you're constantly bargaining and compromising. That allows you at least, I'll speak for myself, that allows me to do creative work in the academy, but also keep my job and not call into question the credibility of the programme. It's one of those enduring dilemmas I think that most practitioners are working with throughout their career.

Eds.: So what I [JR] hear is that, also for institutional reasons, but probably also to some extent if we follow the inner logic of everything that is related to teaching and learning, something like constructive alignment is important. And at the same time, assessments should be authentic and meaningful, not just testing something for the sake of testing it. They should be relevant as you were saying, and at the same time, you of course have a lot of focus on creativity, so that's really fantastic.

SB: Well, if you are preparing people for a very specific function, in Medicine, or in the military, or in Law, then you need to be able to test people; in Nursing, to make sure that they are up to a particular standard; I completely understand the logic of that. But, mostly, I think you do testing to help learning, it's really to help the student that you're doing the testing as an educator. It's not to help the employing or sponsoring agency. An educator's responsibility is to the student, not to the employing agency, and an educator's responsibility is to understand the internal dynamics of learning, and having that be the logic that drives your actions. Rather than the logic of institutional need. And we're often caught in between the two.

So, I think, most of life is an uneasy compromise where Paulo Freire said most of us are in the system but we are not of the system. So we realise as we are caught within

institutional constraints, we realise what they are and how they're operating. But at the same time, we're trying to push them and subvert them, fool people really, allowing us to do creative things without being constantly supervised. You're always trying to carve out a bit of creativity, and really your fidelity is to the learning process and to helping students learn. And that's sometimes bumped up against institutional priorities.

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6. Use and abuse of technology in the classroom and MOOCs not being a disruptive innovation

Eds.: You were saying earlier that you are not a Luddite (we never expected that!), that you have been using technology increasingly and you gave some examples like this backchat channel. Do you ever have any problems with students using their mobile or other digital devices excessively and being very distracted? Do you feel that technology can get in the way?

SB: Yes, absolutely. But I think that's no different from anything else in more traditional teaching. So in a lecture in the past, when I was a student, there were no smartphones or anything. But if I was bored in a lecture, I would be reading music papers under the table or I would have the book I was actually reading covered by the book that was the course textbook [Eds. laugh], or I would let my mind wander and I would doodle a lot. So I don't think that inattention is anything new. It's just that if you have smartphones and tablets and devices, and you're using them in class, there is always that possibility, absolutely, that people will be diverted. And on my Critical Incident Questionnaire tool that I use every week, often students will point out 'the moment I was most distant was when I saw the person next to me shopping for shoes on Ebay', or 'the action that puzzled me the most was this person, we were in a small group, but they were on their phone all the time'.

So in a lecture in the past, when I was a student, there were no smartphones or anything. But if I was bored in a lecture, I would be reading music papers under the table or I would have the book I was actually reading covered by the book that was the course textbook, or I would let my mind wander and I would doodle a lot. So I don't think that inattention is anything new.

So students will raise it as an issue on their anonymous feedback to me and I will present this as an issue to the class, this just happened this week in a class that I was teaching. There had been four students who said they found it really distracting that after we'd done a backchannel chat exercise, people stayed and seemed disengaged because they were interacting with their phones. So I had to bring this to the group and say, well: 'how are we going to deal with this? How do we make sure...?' First, we need to make sure that the interaction is a distraction, maybe people are looking up articles, or maybe they're googling terms that I've used. I certainly, when someone introduces a term in a discussion, I go straight online to google it, or when someone mentions an author's name, I google that person and pull up something they've written. But it absolutely is like everything subject to abuse, so if you're going to use backchannel chat, a social media tool, then I think you'll have to keep incorporating it all the time. You can't just use it once in the class and then say, 'okay, that's it'. I suppose you can use it once and then tell everyone to switch off their phones, something like that, that might be an option.

My option is to say, the students I've learnt with, that's how they've grown up, that's how they process information, that's how they communicate understandings with each other. I mean my kids would text me from within the house [Eds. laugh] as they were growing up. It was quite normal for them, it didn't seem weird at all, and then I would go into their room after they've texted me, and ask 'why are you texting me', and they didn't understand the question [Eds. laugh].

So I'm trying to build in natural rhythms of student communication, student learning, and the way they process information and become exposed to it. Which is difficult for me because I'm a digital immigrant, I didn't grow up with any of this. But as a critically reflected teacher, I have to be aware that the student experience is fundamentally transformed now because of technology, and so it's my responsibility to do my best to stay abreast of that. And I'm a bit of a technophobe so I find it hard to do that, but I've got to do my best because if I take student learning seriously, I need to be familiar with some of the ways that they've grown up processing information and communicating understandings. But yeah, in terms of the question: can it go wrong? Can it be excessive? Absolutely!

But in my view as a teacher, everything goes wrong sooner or later, there is nothing that is not immune to being distorted or to being used in unproductive ways that you've not anticipated. Lectures could be incredibly boring, going way too long, have no opportunity for student input. Discussions can go way off topic, and be dominated by a few people, leave others feeling very frustrated and that this was a waste of time. You can assign pre-reading that can be way over students heads or be way too basic 'cause they've already done this in an earlier course and you didn't know about that. So every teaching act will go wrong sooner or later, if you're defining wrong by 'not working the way you've wanted it to work'. So my feeling is that given that that's true, then what we need to do is to stay on top of how people are experiencing learning as much as we can and that's where the students' eyes lens, in the critically reflective model, the

more I get information about that, the more I can decide whether something I'm using is working in the way that's going to be helpful to students. And if it's not working that way, then I'm very happy to change and try something else, I think that's the essence of skilful teaching really.

Eds.: Since we are talking a little bit about technology, let me ask you about your view about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Open Educational Resources (OER). I [JR] actually talked to George Siemens and some of the people who started the cMOOCs (Canadian, connectivist MOOCs) some ten years ago, and it seemed like a wonderful experiment related to his philosophy of connectivism, and then Harvard and MIT obviously came along with the xMOOCs (very large MOOCs), and Coursera coming from Stanford (Rudolph, 2014). What's your view on the MOOCs, do you think they are a so-called disruptive innovation, or is it perhaps more of a commodification of learning? Since we were talking about Foucault earlier, in his book *Discipline and Punish* (1995), he's also talking about the panopticon. So could that be also used for not so positive purposes, do you have any thoughts on this that you could share with us.

SB: Yeah, well, first of all, you used the phrase commodification, Juergen. is commodified to some degree, my performance is appraised on a merit level rating at the end of each year, I get assigned a numerical score, for example. I have to produce artefacts from students that document their learning which is papers that I have to give grade points for and so on and so forth. So the fact that it's commodified is very predictable, it will happen to everything in a hierarchically organised institution like universities and colleges are. But that doesn't mean that you can't still do valuable things with commodified stuff, if you ground them in what you're trying to get students to learn. So I wouldn't say 'don't write papers' – because how on earth am I going to get a sense of what learning is going on, and what struggles students are having, and what progress they're making, and so on and so forth?

I think everything in Higher Education is commodified to some degree.



Figure 3: Photo of Stephen Brookfield teaching at Columbia University in the 1980s.

So to me, MOOCs are just one additional tool, I've done something for Columbia University in a MOOC that they've just developed on creating inclusive classrooms. To me, a MOOC is like a series of YouTube lectures that you can find, all that stuff out there, and it's free and open access. And I think that MOOCs themselves aren't inherently disruptive. I think, the web has been inherently disruptive! Because now you have access to a lot of information which beforehand, you had to have a university library pass to gain access to. Now all you need is a smart device, and you don't have the total world at your fingertips because there are restrictions in who has access to different scholarly resources and so on, but it's a lot more open than it used to be.

So I don't see MOOCs particularly as a threat, I just see them as an additional source of information. I feel that since a key to student engagement is some kind of meaningful connection to learning or to content and the ability to process that with peers, MOOCs are not so good at doing that, or online is not so good at doing that. And in online courses, I do have to have a panopticon going on in the sense because I give grades for participation. So I'm watching to see if people participate. And if they don't participate in student-to-student discussions, I have to give them a nudge and say 'we haven't heard from you, and remember, 20% of your grade is going to be assigned for the degree to which you helped others with their learning in your cohort'.



Figure 4: The abandoned Presidio Modelo complex in 1995 as an example of a panopticon (McMullen, 2015).

So there is that panopticon going on. I do find that metaphor to be very helpful both in online learning and also in face-to-face teaching. But I try to be open to anything that will assist learning. The thing with the MOOC is that you can review it, whereas in a lecture, unless you're taping it, once the lecturer has explained the point, it's gone into thin air. And if your head was somewhere else while that person was explaining the point, then you've lost the opportunity to interact with that explanation. So generally, the thing I like about online is that most of the resources are up for long periods of time. You can go back, you can replay, you can sit with things in a way that you can't sit with things in a classroom. So for an introvert like me who takes a lot of time processing information, I need time to think through ideas and play with them and read paragraphs over again or watch video segments over again. Any technology that allows me to do that is very helpful. So those are my feelings on MOOCs.

Eds.: To me [JR], MOOCs are just a special case of open education resources (OERs). There's always this concern that our world has more than seven billion people, and a lot of people still don't have access to knowledge and information. But they may also not have the skills and some of the other tools to meaningfully deal with this knowledge and information. So I guess you would regard the OERs as something generally positive?

SB: Yes I would. It fits with my theme of democratising learning. Any attempt to make information available to as many people as possible, I would support. We have a new project in adult education of teaching digital literacy, it used to be teaching media literacy. Now it's teaching digital literacy which I regard not so much as the mechanics of how do you navigate the web and create access, it's more how have you developed the judgment to be critical and sceptical about the sources and information that you have access to.

So I love to play with Wikipedia, I think I talk about some of this stuff in a book *Powerful techniques for teaching adults* (2013), where I have students create knowingly false Wikipedia entries [Eds. laugh] to see if they can get by the inbuilt screening that Wikipedia has. So I'm trying to give people a sense that just as with reading a book as text, reading a website as text, it's been produced somewhere, by someone. So you need to know who has produced it, what was the thinking behind this production, and whose benefit is it that this information be shared in a particular way that it is, are there ways in which the information could be shared in more user- or reader-friendly ways? So I think with open access tools comes this new or additional educational project now, to teach some kind of critical awareness of how those tools have been produced, how they're being used, and in whose interests they work, and whose interests are they set against. So that's a whole interesting area that we've had to deal with lately.

7. Higher Education's potential as an agent of liberation and counter-forces

Eds.: In the 1970s, Ivan Illich wrote *Deschooling Society* (and Emmerich Reimer *School is Dead*). While some of the predictions that the disestablishment of schools (especially the end of compulsory schooling or the end of publicly-funded schools) appear to have been wrong, there is a powerful critique of the "pre-alienating" character of schools in these works. In your excellent book *The Power of Critical Theory for Adult Learning and Teaching*, you have dedicated a whole chapter on Alienation. If we were to hazard a guess, we would say that your position is more that of Marcuse (who you also refer to in the Preface of *The Skillful Teacher*) that while colleges may be perceived as part of the ideological state apparatus, higher education is potentially an agent of liberation. Any thoughts on this?

SB: You're correct. I disagree with Althusser who says that teachers are unaware of the forces constraining them and that they're somehow unwitting agents of the state mindlessly reproducing dominant ideologies. I am much more of Marcuse's position that higher education is a zone

of potential liberation. Even though higher education is hierarchical and hemmed in by accreditation agencies, not to mention the fact that many universities in the USA are working as neo-Fordist capitalist institutions where students are explicitly described as consumers, I still think there are ways that we can push back against dominant ideology. Just as an example, pretty much every higher education institution I know says it's committed to diversity, equity and inclusion. That's a great opportunity to smuggle in an explicit uncovering and challenging of white supremacy. My last collaborative book on *Teaching Race* (2018) explored that project, as does the one I'm working on now titled *Creating an Anti-Racist White Identity*.

Of course there are lots of forces working against higher education as an agent of liberation. I find that pre-tenure colleagues effectively censor themselves from saying anything too critical, for example. Also, most teaching evaluation forms that students complete don't ask students to rate how much their teachers initiated productive discomfort in class, how much they challenged them, how much they disrupted their worldviews and introduced them to radically different takes on the world. Instead they focus on clarity of communication, frequency of feedback, alignment between course goals and assessment procedures and so on. Those are all crucial of course, but I find that people typically teach to reward systems and unless explicit critique is named and rewarded as an essential feature of good teaching, then many will decide not to rock the boat. It's ironic that critical thinking is mentioned in so many mission statements, yet a Marcusean variant of critical thinking – asking big questions about big issues like 'what would it look like for our institution if becoming anti-racist was our top priority?' – is generally avoided. Critical thinking is often reduced to what Marcuse called one-dimensional thought and Horkheimer and Adorno called the instrumentalisation of reason – in other words, problem-solving designed to make the current system work more smoothly.

I myself am in the centre of a grievance dispute with my own institution after my university told me that my Endowed Chair was an "error" and tripled my teaching load – this after my publicly criticising as shameful their desire not to award tenure to an activist colleague and my insisting that uncovering white supremacy at the institution be the focus of our anti-racist efforts. You can read about my situation here: <https://www.twincities.com/2019/06/04/st-thomas-professor-claims-discrimination-over-anti-racism-advocacy/>

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Many colleagues around the world have expressed amazement that my own institution is 'de-endowing' me this way, but I tell them it's entirely predictable. Even with all the cultural capital of my identity – white, male, well-published, worldwide reputation etc. – universities cannot tolerate it when their leadership is publicly criticised and held to account. Of course my university is a private one and we're not unionised so it would be different when it came to public criticism in a unionised environment.

8. How educational institutions can encourage skilful and critically-reflected teaching

Eds.: You have been conducting faculty development workshops for approximately 30 years – can you please share how you would organise one? Any memorable successes and failures with faculty development workshops?

SB: I usually work with whatever the institution tells me about its history and culture and specifically what I learn about the audience involved. I'm pretty flexible in working with all kinds of constraints and even if there's hundreds of people in an auditorium with fixed seating I'll still try and work in an interactive way by using social media like sli.do or backchannelchat.com, by using pair and share, or doing small group protocols like the circle of voices (see Brookfield & Preskill, 2016).

My overarching approach is that I always need to begin with four things in mind. First, I have to find out what people are thinking about when they come into a workshop. Social media polls and anonymous chat platforms mean that in 90 seconds you can get a quick snapshot of how people are approaching the workshop. Second, I need to begin with some appropriate autobiographical disclosure where I link the topic or purpose of the workshop to my own life. A narrative approach is the hook I use to draw people in and get their attention, an idea I stole from a business & management writer, Stephen Denning. Third, I have to model whatever it is I'm asking people to do before I turn to them and invite them into the same activity. So, for example, if it's a workshop on critical thinking, I have to start off by doing that on myself and sharing examples of when I've critiqued my assumptions and deliberately explored alternative perspectives. If it's a workshop on confronting white supremacy, I have to start by talking about the white supremacy that lives within me and how I try to be aware of that and push back against it. Fourth, it's very clear from feedback that people learn most productively when they're engaged in focused discussion or small group activities. So I'll move to those as early as I can in a workshop. But the point is that they must be focused and clearly connected to the themes of the workshop. Assigning small group busyness for the sake of doing group 'stuff' is pointless and a trap I've fallen into many times. People usually hate small groups initially and resist them in workshops because they've been burned so often in the past by meaningless 'group-ness'. But if a small group task or discussion is well designed and tied directly to what people are there for, then it's usually the most positively engaging part of the workshop for them.

Assigning small group busyness for the sake of doing group 'stuff' is pointless and a trap I've fallen into many times.

The details of what then happens depend on what I'm finding out about people's responses through things like the anonymous backchannel chat feed I leave open throughout a workshop to capture reactions, questions, criticisms and comments. As a general rule I believe in scaffolding activities, moving from simple to complex, non-threatening to more threatening, all supported by my modelling and by my checking in on how people are experiencing what's happening. But, as I say in *The Skillful Teacher*, context changes everything so I may decide in the middle of an event to change my plans very drastically and throw everything I'd prepared out of the window. Some good things have happened over the years by my being forced to make something up on the spot.

I don't think of failures and successes so much as I do of surprise and unanticipated events or consequences on the one hand and predictability on the other. I've learned that there's so much that's out of my control in a workshop, class or training, that when things don't go as I anticipate it's often due to factors completely out of my control. I also kind of like it when completely unanticipated things happen. It creates new challenges for me and stretches me in a good way.

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Eds.: Any advice for universities and higher education institutions how to encourage skilful and critically reflected teaching?

SB: I wrote a whole chapter on this topic in *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* so that's the place to go for this answer! But generally I'd say a few things are essential. First, modelling from the top. And by that I mean from the President, Vice-Chancellor & Provost downwards. If you want people to take critically reflective teaching seriously, then that must be consistently demonstrated by those in power and authority. Second, the reward system must work to support this. So exercising critical reflection should be at the centre of hiring decisions, performance appraisals and institutional awards. Third, there needs to be guidance and support for this process, which means that people will need to be given time and resources to do this in groups. Since the best critically reflective practice happens in groups, that means people need a reduction in assignments, course load etc. so they can meet and share experiences. Fourth, instituting team teaching as the norm for Higher Education would go a long way to implanting this in institutions. In a team-taught environment you have a built-in reflective mirror to give you feedback on what's going on, point out things you've missed, see situations through a different pair of eyes. Finally, you need to reframe so-called 'mistakes' as unanticipated occurrences that are to be expected as normal and as the predictable result of giving students more control,

experimenting with creativity, trying to build curricula and assessment formats from the ground up, and so on.

Eds.: You have been teaching in the U.K. and in the U.S. and in many other places. Could you share perhaps your worst and your best teaching experiences, and also what role culture plays in how we conduct our lessons?

SB: My worst teaching experiences were my earliest when I simply mimicked my own teachers from school who were mostly awful. So in my first college classes that I taught my pedagogy was to read from notes that I'd already distributed to the students! Once I followed my own advice in *The Skillful Teacher* – that the most important knowledge you needed to do good teaching was an awareness of how students are experiencing their learning – then my pedagogy became much more responsive and helpful to students.

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9. Art & Pedagogy

Eds.: The penultimate question that we want to ask you is about the role of art. In your book about *The Power of Critical Theory*, you discussed this of course, and Walter Benjamin (2015) was very hopeful about the revolutionary potential of new mass art forms. And Adorno, perhaps a little bit disappointingly, regarded jazz as part and parcel of the culture industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2016). And Marcuse (1979) liked really the higher, 'two-dimensional' culture, whereas Angela Davis (1998) also saw a lot of potential in spirituals, work songs, and the blues. We checked out your website about the 99ers band [SB laughs], it's fabulous, pop punk rock 'n' roll, so does this kind of have to do with your pedagogical work? Do you see a relationship between art and pedagogy? The 99ers is a term for unemployed people in the U.S. who have these 99 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits?

SB: That's correct. Well, to me, I feel that I've been trained in a Eurocentric tradition which privileges cognition, and I love reason, I love thinking things through. I love logic, coming to judgments, all that stuff. But I think most decisions that we make are fundamentally emotional. And so one of the things that has been missing from a lot of my work over the years, so I've really been thinking through, is: what is the role and power of art, artistic experiences, particularly in developing critical awareness of something? So a few years ago I wrote a book called *Engaging Imagination* which was with a fashion designer, Alison James, and that whole book looked at artistic experiences (James & Brookfield, 2013). And it was very helpful for me to spend some time working on that book and thinking this through, and it has very much influenced, for example, how I assess students' work now through creative representation.



Figure 5: Stephen Brookfield.

And I think when you're bringing people to critical awareness of something, to examining their assumptions, you can create a rational access point into it, you can create a narrative access point into it by sharing a dramatic story, or you can create a more artistic access point into it through film or poetry or music or some graphic representation. And I'm very much drawn to Marcuse's work in his book *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1979) where he talks about his idea of rebellious subjectivity. Basically, I understand him to be saying that art is the most revolutionary thing that you can teach in schools because art impacts you on a visceral and emotional level.

And yes, as Adorno says, it's packaged in a culture industry. But even a lot of work on media like Stuart Hall's on encoding and decoding says 'you can have these packaged meanings, but what people take from a film, you can't really control', and there will be some subversive elements in what seems to be a very standard film for some people. So if I could go back and relive my whole career again, I would definitely try to incorporate art much more intentionally.

Up to now I've tended to think that music, which is my passion, is over here in my life and then I have my work as an educator. I've come to realise more recently what connects both of them, certainly, is an interest in how the audience

is receiving what you're doing. So I'm kind of watching an audience at a gig in the way I'm watching students in class. I'm looking for signs of engagement, or what seems to be connecting for when people are getting bored and apathetic and then making changes based on that information. But because, other than music, I'm not very artistically talented, I haven't tended to bring very much up into teaching until, I'd say, maybe the last ten years of my career. And I think when you're trying to do this, to bring in artistic creativity in an environment that is heavily Eurocentric, that's focusing particularly on measurable outcomes, alignment, that's difficult. Because you bring in a film, and let's say you're being observed for tenure that night, and your teaching is essentially bringing in a film, and talking about the film, you're probably not gonna get such a good mark, as if you give a lecture and then run a well-structured discussion. So art is almost seen as diversionary, as an add-on, or as irrelevant rather than a central aspect in how you connect to people. So with critical thinking and criticality, generally, I'm very interested in how we can rethink, or how I can rethink, making artistic experiences as a much more central part of that dynamic.

10. Concluding remarks

Eds.: Is there any concluding remark you would like to give?

SB: Only that I'm sure that is true with the both of you, and most of the teachers that are still awake in class: we're constantly evolving and we're constantly changing. And so I'm very much open to the idea that something I believe and I've spoken this morning about, in a few months' time, I might have a completely different perspective on.

I'm very much open to the idea that something I believe and I've spoken this morning about, in a few months' time, I might have a completely different perspective on.

Because experience would have taught me, I've missed something significant, and that's where the philosophical notion of American pragmatism through [Ralph Waldo] Emerson and others like him comes in. I've always been taught by my own experience and it's where the lens of personal experience as a critically reflected lens comes in, particularly when I'm dealing with where I am right now, with teaching about the very contentious issue of race, I pretty much leave everything that I do feeling: 'aww, man, I could have done that better, I wish I could rewind the video tape and do something different'.

So I feel like I'm just trying to work in the best, most informed way that I can. But experience is constantly teaching me about things that I haven't taken account of and that I omitted up to that point. And that's one of the hardest things to learn as a teacher. I speak for myself. I went into the profession thinking that if I could last for five years or ten years, I basically would have everything worked out, I would have my teaching approach finely honed and then I'd be

an expert. And I feel now, 50 years into it [Eds. laugh], that expertise really is just a constant recalibration and a constant enquiry into trying to better understand the dynamics that you're dealing with, these very complicated dynamics of teaching and learning. So I know that the metaphor of 'becoming' is used a lot and is probably overused, but I think that's really what teaching is, you're constantly *becoming* as a teacher. So if I give this interview and did it again in a year, it may be very different from what it was today.

Eds.: This was absolutely fantastic, we are very grateful, thank you so much!

SB: Well, thank you both, and I look forward to being in touch!

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