

316 Moving from responsibility learning inaction to ‘responsibility learning-in-action’: A student-educator collective writing on the ‘unnoticed’ in the hidden curriculum at business schools

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Research Domains

Academic practice, work, careers and cultures (AP)

Abstract

We are a student-educator writing collective that have come together outside the formal classroom to experiment with ‘writing differently’, imbued with a desire to enact collective resistance against ‘unnoticed’ and intentionally hidden aspects of the business school curriculum that condone, normalize, and reproduce social injustice and inequalities. As students and educator in the Department of Organizational Psychology at a UK-based business school, we see our non-traditional writing as a form of resistance against hegemonic scientific norms of knowledge production that dominate our discipline. We evoked Freire’s problem-posing education through a collective enactment of ‘responsibility learning-in-action’ by participating in regular ‘writing as resistance’ sessions, where we wrote around our lived experiences of the ‘unnoticed’ and intentionally hidden curriculum and responsibility learning in the same virtual space and time and then read aloud to one another. Our coming together through this practice (re)claims relationality and solidarity in the student-educator relationship.

Full paper

We are a writing collective made up of four people – three students and one educator from the Department of Organizational Psychology of a UK-based business school – that have come together outside the formal classroom to experiment with ‘writing differently’, imbued with a desire to enact collective resistance against ‘unnoticed’ and intentionally hidden aspects of the business school curriculum that condone, normalize, and reproduce social injustice and inequalities, and against the hegemonic scientific norms of knowledge production that dominate our discipline. Our initiative is an exploration of the possibilities such a collective can create to develop responsibility learning, defined as “the implicit and explicit learning and unlearning of and about responsible and irresponsible practices” (Laasch, 2018: 12), related in the business school curriculum to ethics, corporate social responsibility, sustainability, inequality, diversity, and governance (Padan and Nguyen, 2020).

The catalyst for our ‘writing as resistance’ experiment was our mutual experience of ‘an unsettling’, described as “an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality” (Cunliffe, 2002: 38). The unsettling process occurred when we were confronted with learning material in the business school curriculum that perpetuates the irresponsible practice of white supremacist scientific racism through the promotion of general cognitive ability testing (Andrews, 2021; Kendi, 2019) as “one of the best predictors of performance on the job” (Nye et al., 2022: 1119) that fails to acknowledge and redress its eugenics roots and legacy. We embarked on our collective writing with a deep desire to call out the role of the ‘unnoticed’ (and at times, intentionally) hidden-in-plain-sight aspects of the business school hidden curriculum (Blasco et al., 2012) in perpetuating social injustice and inequalities and the implications for business schools in developing leaders and professionals with(out) a clear sense of their responsibility to the world.

We evoked Freire’s problem-posing education through a collective enactment of ‘responsibility learning-in-action’ by participating in regular ‘writing as resistance’ sessions, where we wrote around our lived experiences of the ‘unnoticed’ and intentionally hidden curriculum and responsibility learning in the same virtual space and time. The 60-to-90-minute writing sessions all followed a similar structure: initial discussions on the themes and direction of our respective writing, followed by 30 minutes of individual writing (while remaining connected online to the rest of the group with our microphones muted), and then the reading aloud of our individual pieces at the end of the sessions. We recognize and embrace the intersubjectivity enabled by the sharing which took place before and after our

individual writing, adding an element of collective and relational sensemaking into our individual reflections. After three months of weekly writing sessions, the individual raw texts produced by each member of the collective during the writing sessions were compiled into one single document, and subsequently analysed by each member to identify key themes. The analysis of this collectively generated body of individual writing constituted an exercise in reflexive dialogical practice (Cunliffe, 2002), to build our collective voice, by agreeing on the final themes, their characteristics, and the most relevant extracts to illustrate them, through collaborative discussions. This practice continued through the development of a journal article sharing our movement's output through chosen extracts and their analysis (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya et al., 2023).

This output can be summarised through three contributions. Firstly, our work introduces the concept of 'responsibility learning-in-action' into the conversation and literature around responsibility learning and the hidden curriculum, using our own reflections and lived experiences to expose practices of responsibility learning inaction, by creating a space and time to explore and enact our common ambition. Secondly, by introducing our collective writing as our "vibrant activism of thinking as doing" (Diversi et al., 2021: 303), we open the possibilities of knowledge production through student-educator relationality and solidarity inside and outside the formal classroom (Cunliffe, 2003; Orón Semper & Blasco, 2018). Thirdly and finally, through our reflexive dialogical practice, we offer a methodology and a model for co-authorship and co-production that reimagines what is normatively practiced within Organizational Psychology and more broadly, in business schools, aiming to develop students' power as active, central, and legitimate knowledge producers.

This act of collective writing is our way of enacting Freire's problem-posing education, where "people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (Freire, 1970: 56). It encourages others in higher education to exercise this power.

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