

## Going Places

### Praxis and Pedagogy in Australian Cultural Studies

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The abrupt transition from high school to tertiary education in Australia involves a giant growth of scholarly maturity. Part of its significance is because of the methodological differences in each educational tier. There exists a tangible gulf between pedagogy as it is encountered in the high school context and at the tertiary level: where high school learning privileges ‘youthful’ interactivity, university classes rely on more ‘mature’ individual written assignments. Following Henry A. Giroux, and considering pedagogy in the specific field of cultural studies, we can begin to unpack this contrast between ‘youthful’ and ‘mature’ approaches. Giroux defines ‘youth’ through a negative dialectic; that is, it appears ‘present only when its presence is a problem’.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it seems that education at the tertiary level explicitly—or perhaps unwittingly—sets out to replace the effervescence of youth with measured wisdom, field trips with essays, and interactivity with controlled discussion. In response, Giroux recommends a return to the ‘doing’ of cultural studies—in a way analogous to the youthful approach generally demonstrated in high school education. John Hartley has taken up the issue of the difference between

knowing and doing, reminding us of the ‘medieval distinction between action and contemplation’, wherein ‘some professional practitioners assert that practical “doing” is in opposition to academic “knowing”’, and that ‘the tradition of modern scholarship—now some centuries old—has tended to favor the abstraction of knowledge from action’.<sup>2</sup> Giroux is thus recommending that we reverse this trend in academic thought, resisting eschewing the practical ‘doing’ over more calculatedly scriptural practices. Furthermore, we must be mindful, as Nancy Barnes points out, of ‘how deeply culture is implicated in the complex and delicate project of learning’.<sup>3</sup> As we know, rather than being a separate, nebulous entity that requires in-class analysis, culture is indeed always already present: it is inseparable from the teacher teaching the students, the students discussing cultural theory and the cultural theory in tutorial reading lists.

We consider the points discussed above in the following way: first, we provide working definitions for ‘praxis’, ‘pedagogy’ and ‘cultural studies’ as discussed within this article. Second, we explore cultural studies as it is being taught and learned at the University of Western Australia (UWA), and thus embedded within an Australian context.<sup>4</sup> Third, we use this case study as a departure point for suggestions on how to teach cultural studies—and indeed any discipline—with a renewed sense of pedagogical innovation. Finally, we conclude that active participation in the teaching and studying of this field most effectively leads to the achievement of its aims as a self-reflexive discourse. It should be noted that while cultural studies teachers can certainly enhance their own insights and practice, throughout the discussion we focus on the undergraduate student as the central beneficiary of our pedagogical propositions.

#### —WHAT IS PRACTICE?

In line with our focus on undergraduate students, we privilege the act of praxis as a critical pedagogical strategy in tertiary education. More specifically, for the purposes of this article, we define ‘praxis’ as the necessary interrelationship between cultural theory and embodied practice. Matts Mattsson and Stephen Kemmis provide a useful account of praxis in ‘Praxis-Related Research: Serving Two Masters?’, where they develop a set of criteria for evaluating and improving praxis in research and development projects.<sup>5</sup> Although based on research in the social sciences rather

than teaching in the humanities, their definition of 'praxis' provides a useful foundation from which our suggestions borrow. They note the Greek origins of the term where, according to Aristotle, praxis is 'morally informed action aimed at achieving some ethical good'. Comparing Aristotle's support of practical knowledge to Plato's consideration of ideas to be nascent representations of truth, they then show how a Marxist praxis can take the form of 'revolutionary action'.<sup>6</sup> We draw on both Aristotelian and Marxist definitions of praxis, but deviate from each in one fundamental way: our idea of praxis is based on neither ethical paradigms nor class revolution, but is instead centred on practical experience as a pedagogical tool in and of itself. This formulation of praxis supports the development of a more thorough awareness of issues surrounding ethics, class, sexuality, gender and race, while holistically privileging them all. Similarly, we agree with Mattsson and Kemmis that 'academic knowledge might be one element on a menu where many other types of knowledge, talents and capacities are important'; that 'critical reflection is crucial'; and finally, that non-traditional 'aesthetic, artistic and dramatic forms' like '[e]xhibitions, pictures, metaphors and music ... [h]umour and satire' should diversify overly scriptural methodologies.<sup>7</sup> Mindful of Mattsson and Kemmis's approach, our article explores some of the existing pedagogical approaches to cultural studies as well as suggestions for future practice.

Returning to commentaries like those by Giroux and Hartley, we note that both critics support pedagogical innovations that raise consciousness about how to prevent cultural prejudices from being replicated within the classroom. We borrow from these suggestions and combine pedagogical theory with quantitative research from undergraduates, postgraduates and academic staff at the University of Western Australia. We thus provide suggestions towards an innovative, spirited and active curriculum framework in which cultural studies and its practitioners at all levels can thrive. Implicit in our discussion is the recognition that, as a practice, cultural studies responds to the contexts in which it is enacted. While commentators like Peter F. Murphy have previously claimed praxis is vital to cultural studies, such investigations have largely failed to provide specific means by which praxis can be enacted at a pedagogical level.<sup>8</sup> For example, after lengthily outlining the wholesale history of cultural studies in Western academia, Murphy abruptly closes with some suggestions for 'specific conferences a radical cultural studies program might

organise'.<sup>9</sup> His analysis fails to admit that conferences belong to a relatively advanced academic community, as opposed to the grass-roots interactivities from which we suggest students and practitioners would most benefit. Murphy also claims that if 'academic conferences must prevail, they should at least include examples of cultural creativity'.<sup>10</sup> While this suggestion is useful to some extent, it arguably bypasses the core interests of undergraduate students of cultural studies and consequently reinforces the dominance of more established scholars in the field. No doubt praxis in conference settings would serve as a useful tool for those already in the know, but are undergraduates being forgotten here?

—PEDAGOGY AS A PERFORMATIVE PRACTICE

Entry-level students require a strong orientation in the central tenets of power and context in cultural studies. We contend that cultural studies in the classroom needs to be both *learned* and *done* to engender in students a deeper understanding of what those tenets constitute. Based on the results of our research, it appears that students' positions within the practical qualities of culture can be utilised—alongside traditional pedagogical tools—to enrich their participation in cultural studies. We have divided our suggestions towards a revised emphasis on praxis into a pedagogical tripartite—classroom, assessment and outcomes—to detail the three main components of tertiary education. The suggested activities under each component highlight the importance of praxis in mobilising students to produce more meaningful connections with the field. According to Giroux, pedagogy is a performative practice,

not simply about the social construction of knowledge, values, and experiences; it is also a performative practice embodied in the lived interactions among educators, audiences, texts, and institutional formations. Pedagogy, at its best, implies that learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices and settings.<sup>11</sup>

If pedagogy itself is both about knowledge and practice, then a pedagogical enquiry into cultural studies should also employ a practical component that acknowledges the complexities of performativity in its curriculum.<sup>12</sup> Giroux goes on to suggest that pedagogy 'provides a discourse' and is 'an important theoretical tool' for understanding institutional constraints on knowledge, learning and academic

labour.<sup>13</sup> Taking cues from his analysis, we ask how institutions and teachers should deploy pedagogical tools, and to what ends discourse should lead. Our decision to enumerate practical examples of pedagogical approaches to activities in the classroom is informed by Handel Kashope Wright's suggestion that 'it is important to point to concrete examples of cultural studies as praxis, not only because this grounds and substantiates an otherwise ethereal argument for praxis but [because it] can inform future cultural studies as praxis work'.<sup>14</sup> Using Wright, our findings also support Giroux's claim that successful pedagogies take place across a spectrum of 'social practices and settings'.<sup>15</sup> In addition to the theory in this article, we have incorporated the results of undergraduate, postgraduate and academic staff surveys regarding current strategies in teaching cultural studies. As we will show, the quantitative data and verbatim responses across the board support our suggestions that students would benefit by engaging in extramural activities.<sup>16</sup> Our title 'Going Places' refers not only to practical activities, but also the pedagogical imperative to further students' learning and confidence within the university environment and subsequently into the workforce.

—CULTURAL STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA AND INTERNATIONALLY: A CASE STUDY

The field of cultural studies is notoriously hard to define, which many of its proponents believe is its greatest strength. In *Bringing It All Back Home: Pedagogy and Cultural Studies*, Lawrence Grossberg explains that cultural studies germinated in 'extramural departments' and 'adult working-class courses' rather than in a university context.<sup>17</sup> Grossberg's acknowledgment of the anti-establishment spirit that motivated the historical development of cultural studies illuminates its class-conscious attitude. According to Ben Agger, cultural studies, at its best, is 'an activity of critical theory that directly decodes the hegemonising messages of the culture industry permeating every nook and cranny of lived experience, from entertainment to education'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Michael Green writes:

Cultural studies has thus not become a new form of 'discipline'. Attempts to 'unify' the field ... are premature or unsatisfactory beneath a very high level of abstraction ... Equally, the notion of interdisciplinarity no longer seems forceful.<sup>19</sup>

Along with the closure of the Birmingham School in 2002, these hazy definitions raise important questions regarding the continued relevance of cultural studies and its teaching practices. For our purposes here, we combine cultural studies' historical genesis within class ideology with a more contemporary view of culture as all-enveloping and widely distributed to broadly define cultural studies as *a study of and engagement with culture*. Our definition purposely allows for a cross-genre study of texts to include film, graphic novels, street art, theatre, dance and other permutations of human expression.

The implications for how students learn about literary and media texts must also be considered further within an Australian context. Taking an admittedly arbitrary glance around Australia, we see that tertiary cultural studies programs vary widely between institutions. The University of Melbourne offers a major in cultural studies at undergraduate level through the School of Culture and Communication. Monash University has a Centre for Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies, composed of interdisciplinary and interdepartmental academics, and the undergraduate first year subjects ('Texts & Contexts 1 and 2'), are compulsory core units. The University of Queensland includes a Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, and the University of Sydney has a Department of Gender and Cultural Studies, where students can complete majors in each of these two areas. Similarly, students can complete a major in cultural studies as part of their Bachelor of Arts degree at Southern Cross University. The implementation of cultural studies at our institution, the University of Western Australia, we discovered, is a relatively recent phenomenon. To complement our quantitative data, we surveyed the university's handbooks in order to embed our findings within the historical development of the field at this case study institution. According to the 1980–1983 UWA handbooks, English units were still mostly focused on literary analysis, as typified by the first year foundational unit 'English 120: An Introduction to the Critical Reading of English Literature'. In 1985, 'English 130: Language, Image and Critical Awareness' was implemented, which assumed that 'every literary form comes replete with a set of cultural and philosophical assumptions', signifying an emergent and culturally focused trend. From this brief historical synopsis, it can be seen that UWA has a relatively young history in promoting the development of

cultural studies as a valuable tool of textual inquiry. This provides an ideal place for the dissemination of surveys we will present later in the paper.

It is clear that cultural studies occurs in different forms at various universities around the globe. A somewhat cursory comparative analysis with tertiary institutions in other parts of the world provides the following insights.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, the University of California, Berkeley, includes an area of postgraduate study called 'Literary and Cultural Studies' in its Rhetoric Department, but at Yale University cultural studies does not appear to be explicitly taught among the world cinema and literary theory units in the Department of Comparative Literature. Moving across to Europe, the Freie Universität Berlin has an Institute for English Language and Literature, within which the Discipline of Cultural Studies operates; at the Université Paris Sorbonne-Paris IV, French language studies is combined with comparative literature, with no single 'cultural studies' department or area as such. At the University of Oxford, there is a 'cultural studies programme', and at the University of Cambridge cultural studies can be studied as part of a degree in Medieval and Modern Languages. In Asia, the University of Hong Kong has a major in Comparative Literature, with one of the themes of the course being 'Literary and Cultural Theory', as well as 'Film, Visual, and New Media Studies'. On the University of Hong Kong's Comparative Literature website, the learning outcomes of the course include the verbs 'acquire', 'examine', 'critique', 'evaluate', 'apply', 'develop', and 'demonstrate'. Notably, verbs such as 'practise', or 'participate' are absent from these learning outcomes. At the same time, assessment at the University of Hong Kong is '100% continuous', including 'essay writing, oral presentations in tutorials, take-home or in-class tests'.<sup>21</sup> Unsurprisingly, it seems that the emphasis on traditional methods of assessment outweighs the translation of those skills into practice. These international examples will be implicitly considered further in our following suggestions.

Here, we are interested in addressing the challenge of acquiring quantitative research to ground our theoretical questions. Our first-hand experiences as young scholars within the university have motivated us to reflect on our own pedagogical practices. As Meaghan Morris has expressed, a 'literary reading of a shopping mall that does not seriously engage with questions that arise in history, sociology and economics, remains ... a literary reading, not cultural studies'.<sup>22</sup> We have thus

explored how pedagogical innovations in the classroom can renew ways in which students engage with texts through a cultural studies approach. In determining the scope of information data for this project, we obtained a cross-section of the UWA discipline group of English and Cultural Studies (ECS). To this end, we extended the parameters of our study to include postgraduate students and academic staff members alongside undergraduate responses. We collected responses from ten ECS staff, six postgraduate students, and twenty-two undergraduate students in the second/third year unit ENGL2218 Reading Texts, Mediating Cultures, a unit that could properly be considered a cultural studies unit at UWA.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, because of the difficulty in disseminating feedback surveys to already over-surveyed students nearing the end of a teaching semester and the consequently low response rate, our sample number is limited to a total of thirty-eight. The undergraduate response can be summarised as follows: in response to the question 'Do you believe cultural studies is taught successfully in ECS at present?', eighteen of the twenty-two respondents agreed that it is taught successfully, three responded with 'strongly agreed', and one participant did not select any of the response options. Of the eighteen who agreed that cultural studies was being taught successfully, nine students suggested specific curriculum changes. Overwhelmingly, the nature of the changes suggested was to increase the practical component and adopt a more 'hands-on' approach to engaging with cultural studies.

#### *Classroom*

According to the overall results of our study, students are calling for a more varied and practical approach to cultural studies, both inside and outside the classroom. Opinions varied among the twenty-two responses we obtained—one stated that there was 'too much reading', that there should be 'a guideline/course reader to go with the textbook', and that readings should be 'less complex'. There is in fact a course reader (perhaps mistaken for a textbook), but the readings in this unit are indeed dense in terms of quality rather than quantity. Students without adequate prior knowledge of philosophy, media theory and sociology may struggle in class if the teacher does not provide introductory comments and guidance. However, when asked for specific curriculum changes they would like to see implemented, the majority of respondents suggested that the teaching of cultural studies should be



more interactive, more practical and more lively. One respondent wrote that she or he would like to see 'less theoretical material and more technical exercises', while another requested 'more practical [work] than theory'. Yet another acknowledged that 'discussion is good, but visiting places would [also] be interesting' and added that 'experience is a good learning method'. Another respondent wrote, 'going to places more would maybe be more interesting than just reading, being *shown* might be an interesting change' (emphasis in original); she or he also noted that 'at other institutions, they might focus more on their own culture'. This point raises interesting questions about the locality of texts studied under the umbrella of cultural studies. Respondents also called for 'concrete examples [from] day-to-day life', and more discussion on 'how different theorists correlate'. The students' responses are in line with John Smyth, Geoffrey Shacklock and Robert Hattam's arguments in *Doing Critical Cultural Studies: An Antidote To Being Done To*, where the authors, from Flinders University, suggest that if the role of school 'is to (re)claim a specific function in the cultural learning of young people, its role must shift from one of cultural immersion to one of critical cultural interpretation'.<sup>24</sup> Overall, the students surveyed seemed to have grasped the significance of cultural theories, but their understanding of how they may engage with those theories in self-reflexive ways lacked a strong correlation with the theories' influence on their lives outside the classroom. We therefore propose the following options for improving classroom engagement with texts and contexts and meeting students' expectations.

As an example of increasing student engagement with cultural studies, Smyth, Shacklock and Hattam suggest that as celebrities, Princess Diana's, Madonna's, Michael Jackson's and Michael Jordan's roles in the media spotlight can be deconstructed for analyses of 'attitudes about sexuality, gender, race and class'.<sup>25</sup> Such critiquing of popular culture can effectively equip students to analyse *their* worlds and lead to an awareness of their multiple positionalities as both consumers and critics. Students could, for example, broach the topic of the distinction between high and low art, the 'postmodern collapse' of which Robert Briggs considers an illusion.<sup>26</sup> Not only could students engage in debates regarding claims around the stratification of art, but they might be expected to engage in both forms by attending anything from gallery exhibition openings to street market stalls, and documenting

evidence to support or argue against such divisions. In addition, using celebrities as 'case studies' into the tabloid display of personal trauma and media involvement in personal matters can further ethical debates about privacy, for example. Racial and religious prejudice can be analysed from the perspective of different community groups by setting 'interview' tasks each week, with each student being assigned a minority group over the semester to interview and record, then create a five-minute summary recording to play to the class. This activity would necessarily be implemented with the appropriate ethics clearances and explanations regarding ethical interviewing techniques and the importance of cultural respect. Students could then be asked to critique whether media representation of both the minority group and the majority 'mass opinion' accurately represent the information acquired.

The outcome of such activity, as we shall see in below, would be the formation of a 'critique on critique', whereby cultural studies students become attentive to and acknowledge their own ingrained ideologies, alongside those of the wider community. Briggs lucidly calls the unawareness of individuals holding expected viewpoints 'critical prejudice', saying he intends to 'raise the possibility that cultural studies' intellectual and pedagogical practice may actually be complicit with the reproduction of a logic of mass culture'.<sup>27</sup> To combat the unconscious reproduction of non-critical thinking, once cultural studies theory has been taught within the confines of the classroom it would be beneficial to then expect students to consider its truth-value 'out there', where culture is produced, consumed and distributed.

We also propose that students be thoroughly introduced to the use of new technologies that are increasingly used in the dissemination of cultural ideologies. Contemporary ideas such as image, representation, power and truth in popular culture can be more readily accessed and engaged with by employing the very tools with which they work and media in which they occur. Considerations towards the public-private split, privacy in the internet age and information dissemination and control can benefit from serious discussions about social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, photographic databases like Flickr and the content filtering of online search-engines such as Google. Classroom activities during tutorials could include an entirely online tutorial, using only webcam, Skype and message boards or live chat. Students could then compare these modalities of communication to the

usual face-to-face tutorials to encourage debate regarding the strengths and weaknesses of online interaction. Tapping into current software technology has the added benefit of reducing teaching costs and environmental impacts, as there would be less need to print hard copies of essays, feedback and so on.

Ben Agger provocatively argues that cultural studies is a 'baby boom phenomenon', born of the first generation raised on television between 1947 and 1960.<sup>28</sup> The rise of television as a new mass medium for information and communication has resulted in new methodologies for the study of culture. Teachers can utilise multimedia and online pedagogical tools, such as WebCT, to encourage discussion between students, such as how particular cultural issues relate to their lives. In 2007, John W. Robertson and Sally Lee investigated technology-based distance learning and its use in online seminars and discussions. Their results suggested that monitored online discussions between students 'within a blended learning strategy' of other pedagogical techniques proved it to be 'quite inclusive, generating high levels of participation and drawing out quieter students'.<sup>29</sup> Such online discussions through WebCT or other educational platforms can be incorporated into the assessment of students' understanding of theory discussed in the tutorials. Robertson and Lee, borrowing from C. B. Lalli and S. Feger, outline the ways in which online discussion can be assessed by noting the differences between levels of student participation, for example, a 'low-level comment', a 'new point', a 'theory', 'positive framing', and so on.<sup>30</sup> Assessment, then, as we will explore later, can be semester-wide and accessed at students' and teachers' convenience, ensuring that the consideration of cultural theory continues outside the classroom.

As well as encouraging independent thought and paving the way for the use of new technologies, we support teacher-student intellectual honesty. The multiple definitions of cultural studies are often difficult to navigate, yet students don't always have the opportunity to grasp the full potentiality of theory because they frequently encounter concepts in abstract configurations that do not bear much ostensible relevance to their everyday lives. Phillip Bell from the University of Technology, Sydney, recently commented that 'academics perhaps have a professional responsibility to begin teaching where the students themselves are'.<sup>31</sup> He reinforces the need for teachers to engage in a dialogical process that recognises conventional understandings about, for example, language, before engaging them in

poststructuralist perspectives about the slippery network of signification. Praxis in the classroom can further intellectual honesty because students are encouraged to unpack their personal experiences within the bounds of tertiary institutions. By drawing on their personal interactions with their environs, students can profit from a wealth of everyday cultural experiences to practise self-reflexivity and call into question cultures at play.

The study of cultural studies has produced—perhaps unsurprisingly—the binary stratification of ‘academic’ versus ‘street’ cultural studies. We believe that syllabi within English and Cultural Studies at UWA, and more than likely other departments in other Australian universities, are skewed a little too far towards the former. Alan O’Shea, founder of the cultural studies program at the University of East London, states that the ‘cultural critic is always-already positioned *within* institutions’.<sup>32</sup> Teachers of cultural studies, then, are placed within the educational institution and their classes remain almost completely within these academic walls. There are also broad determinants such as technology-driven production and the rise of social minority narratives that have ‘exerted particularly significant pressures against the kinds of practice cultural studies has proposed for itself in the past—collaborative, interventionist, pedagogically innovative, etc.’.<sup>33</sup> Hence, it has become evident in our findings that students are calling for a return to practical intervention. As O’Shea says, there has been ‘so much debate about the intellectual formation of the field and so little about pedagogy’.<sup>34</sup> It is necessary to overcome these output pressures and instead focus on the input of practical extramural skills in student experiences.

#### *Assessment*

Assessment tests knowledge gained during class time and personal study, and accordingly, most assessment takes place temporally separate from classes. On the whole, tertiary assessment in cultural studies units at UWA requires written production of assessable work, based on theoretical reading. Instances of extramural projects, self-reflexive pieces and oral or aural assessment are rare, to say the least. One of our questionnaire respondents confessed to ‘too much reading, [and I] often don’t have enough time to do it all when assignment time rolls around’, creating too-much-too-soon workloads. In particular, the demarcation between

tutorial reading and assignments reveals the non-symbiotic relationship between teaching and assessment. While within the classroom we happily profess the collapse of high/low distinctions, discourage elitism and emphasise the importance of creativity, come assessment time our visual learners and personable public speakers are left strewn along the margins, with perhaps only one short tutorial presentation per semester in which they can shine. On the basis that non-scriptural communication skills are forgotten in traditional pedagogy, we offer the following new methodologies for assessment in cultural studies.

First, students should be offered a choice regarding the communicative medium in which they prefer to present their knowledge. Hartley fittingly reminds us that 'print was an agent of generative change, not a neutral tool; it carried the modernizing force of realism'. By incorporating 'doing' assessments rather than 'writing' ones, we privilege applied knowledge over the 'disembodied, monologic enunciation and visual spatialization of print'.<sup>35</sup> One of the postgraduates in our survey raised an interesting point regarding how visual texts are taught as opposed to how they could be taught:

[Students] should be taught how to engage with a visual text in itself, rather than read a text in a literary way. Visual texts are taught alongside literary texts without the necessary attention to the differences between the visual and literary.

This comment highlights the importance of nuances in teaching texts other than canonical and literary texts. The multimedia trend is also reflected in our data, as one staff member in our survey suggested the importance of allowing for 'texts that are not literary or filmic, like radio or jokes'. In the realm of assessment, projects such as radio presentations, skits or interviews can allow for students who excel at verbal communication to draw upon those skills, particularly those whose degrees or future career plans also involve media or communication studies. Students with an artistic bent could create poster presentations or works of art as the focus of their assignments, and group assignments like collaborative theatre pieces, role-plays or other projects would exist alongside essays or reports. In this regard, it is important to pay heed to the 'university itself ... as a site of praxis, a site where issues of difference, representation and social justice, and even what constitutes legitimate academic work are being contested'.<sup>36</sup> In essence, when testing the

students' knowledge gained in a cultural studies unit, the tradition of requiring only formal written assessment must be noticed and amended to support other models that are complementary to varying kinds of intelligences, and other inclusive cultural forms of communication apart from the written word.

Furthermore, self-reflexive commentary on assignments, theory and discussions should be incorporated into assessment. Pedagogically, reflecting on why and how students wrote or thought what they did is a vital step towards deep learning and critical awareness of the agency that cultural studies encourages. Barnes notes the problem of the 'vast separation that many successful students maintain between their academic performance and the things that they really know and care about for themselves'.<sup>37</sup> An introspective element to assessment would require a blend of the academic and the individual. In this way, students would have the opportunity to reflect on the curriculum, and their performance, using this assessment to amplify their comprehension of critical agency. Moreover, small assessments could perhaps occur incrementally throughout the semester as part of tutorial projects and activities, thus reducing teachers' workloads of intensive marking and relieving the pressure of 'assessment time' for students. A semester-long assessment scheme—perhaps partly through assessed online discussion boards—reinforces cumulative theoretical learning provided in tutorial readings. Such a scheme would also support the practical approach that students prefer, while decreasing the amount of marking in the limited time frame that usually constitutes the 'assessment period'. Completing smaller projects more often over the entire semester increases students' long-term attention because assessment is continuous, and forms a constant measure of ability over the span of the unit.

#### *Outcomes*

The preceding discussion regarding classroom activities and assessment techniques should contribute towards raising students' awareness, critique, practice and participation in the meanings of cultural studies. A primary goal of pedagogical practice should include cultivating consciousness of the social, political and technological frameworks that encompass the community in which the institution is situated, and the global village at large. As Michael Denning writes:

self-consciousness is a virtue when it means a genuinely reflective sense of one's own being, one's own situation in the world, and one's own impact on others; but this is dialectically related to self-consciousness in the other sense—awkwardness, embarrassment, the all-too-awful consciousness of one's own body and clothes and style in situations where one is out of place.<sup>38</sup>

Self-consciousness comes about through an investigation of previously unquestioned topics, through theoretical readings and practical investigation. Classroom discussion and extramural projects on minority groups, gender issues, media news cycles, and so on, will bring to light, in a personalised and hands-on method, issues with which the students will be moved to engage. To place this discussion in the context of our qualitative research, we obtained six responses from postgraduate students in the discipline of ECS. One postgraduate suggested a more 'experimental engagement with the politics of the local', and for students to 'get into groups and enact the kinds of textualities we study'. Another postgraduate raised an idea about 'being clearer about which units focus on cultural studies, and maybe a progression [covering the development of cultural studies]'. There was consensus among three of the postgraduates surveyed that cultural studies is taught implicitly in ECS. Another offered a comparative perspective with overseas universities:

From my experiences overseas, specifically at UK universities, there is not as much emphasis in UWA on the study of Cultural Studies as a discipline in itself. Literature is still the primary focus in our department, with other cultural productions usually being taught as secondary texts.

Interestingly, the answers obtained from postgraduate responses accorded—in different ways—with undergraduate and staff responses. The similarity with undergraduate responses was the emphasis on the need for practical activities to augment theoretical understandings of cultural studies. The postgraduate responses were also aligned with the overwhelming majority of staff, who mostly believed cultural studies is currently being taught successfully at UWA. The postgraduate respondents also noted that, despite the above quoted opinion, a cultural studies approach resides implicitly in all modes of literary and cultural analysis in ECS. We use UWA merely as a case study; these findings open the field of cultural studies to new and exciting possibilities Australia-wide and internationally. We believe there

are tangible benefits to incorporating cultural practice into the teaching of cultural studies. There should also be an emphasis on issues relevant to Australian communities, on both micro and macro scales, and how they might relate to the texts under inquiry. From this basis, students can enter into more complex debates about how they choose to 'read' texts and contexts from around the globe.

With awareness comes understanding, and more diligent pedagogical levels of enquiry will lead students to evaluate widely accepted critical stances in novel and important ways. For instance, the de-ghettoisation of postcolonial texts in new curriculum strategies should permit them to be read in non-Anglocentric and non-marginalised ways, as texts that are important in themselves—as excursions in post-coloniality and *other things* besides. One of the faculty member interviewees currently teaching cultural studies noted the danger of habitual 'groupings' of texts such as the 'ghettoisation' of postcolonial texts. It is far too easy to continue down an Anglocentric-looking-outwards path, and rather,

we should extend disciplinary approaches into non-West-centred inquiry, both in text form and physically. We should be using key theoretical concepts as tools across key areas, modelling links between ideas, but also not shy away from getting students to embrace ambiguity. Complexity and ambiguity need not be so bad.

The suggestion to 'embrace ambiguity' is important; moreover, it requires students to be sufficiently grounded in theoretical concepts to understand if and when ambiguity is relevant. Asking students to enact theoretical considerations where possible is an important and ethical means to cultivating critical cultural interpretative skills within students.

A revised cultural studies curriculum that combines classroom critical theory with practical projects, discussions and activities is one that privileges praxis. Through the *doing* of cultural studies and theory, students will move from understanding and evaluating it to enacting it themselves, thereby inculcating the essential tenets of cultural studies within these participants in cultural studies. No longer solely observers of the field, but *agents* within it, students will continue their roles as disseminators of culture, but increasingly assess and alter those prejudices, practices and issues with which they agree or disagree. In this sense, the ethical premise of cultural studies as a *practice*—as well as a fluid constellation of



theories—that responds to fluctuations in power, accountability and creativity, can be more successfully maintained. One postgraduate respondent lengthily observed:

Cultural Studies' associations with activism, and its attention to the importance of the local and particular, are great starting points to develop curriculum changes. I would like to see students draw from their own current activist projects, community engagement, and/or creative projects to critique the literature that is discussed in class. That is, it would be good if it were a requirement that students engage in one of these activities as an 'experimental' engagement with the politics of the local, and bring these experiences to bear on the theory/texts they read, and vice versa ... For instance, a unit on 'Masculinities' could introduce some theory on masculinities, as well as include film, and perhaps some popular music, historical materials etc, but include a major project where students had to get into groups and enact the kinds of textualities we study: e.g. perform in drag at the Court [gay and lesbian bar]; create a small tee-shirt campaign to wear in the Hay St Mall [in Perth's CBD] and record people's responses, etc.

Practices such as community engagement and creative projects would signal a renewed pedagogical commitment to students embodying the kinds of theory cultural studies seeks to promote. This commitment would inject experiences of local participation into the university environment, and respond to student requests for experiential activities. If a cultural studies class is truly successful, the pedagogical benefits will continue well beyond the final weeks of a given unit or course. Increased awareness of social issues and experience in the realms in which they are present, within student communities and elsewhere, should lead students to critically and meaningfully assess their multiple positionalities in relation to issues of race, gender, class and media. It is our responsibility not only to teach but also to encourage a desire for a lifelong commitment to the implicit study of culture. Providing the tools for critical skills in independent thought will assist students to acknowledge the ways in which various subjectivities co-exist. Moreover, it will promote the ability of students to assess their ethical responsibilities towards each different community member.

If we are not careful, students will be all too ready to accept 'resistant' readings of texts, and this position can reify the 'resistant reading' as a canonical practice. Robert Briggs discusses Catharine Lumby's reinterpretation of a conventionally resistant, and potentially problematic, reading of a newspaper commercial to illustrate this point. In her article, Lumby questions the simplistic ways in which interpretations of a print advertisement assumed the disempowerment of the central female figure. In this context, Briggs argues:

Rather than presuming that audiences are always capable of appropriating cultural texts in 'resistant' ways ... [Lumby] questions ... the way in which a particular critical discourse—in her case, an institutionalised form of 'feminism'—functions so as to regulate and mobilise the kinds of responses audiences routinely display.<sup>39</sup>

Briggs argues that 'cultural studies' relation to audience activity would, on this account, take the form of disseminating skills for conducting critical-creative responses to and readings of cultural texts'.<sup>40</sup> The point here is that it is not enough for students to adopt first-level critical reading skills without developing a comprehensive understanding of what those skills enable. To conduct a more complex reading of a text, students need deeper learning about the multiple forces that have shaped a text. In turn, this will allow them to engage in more 'critical-creative' interpretation of texts. Further, by enacting this kind of 'worldliness', to use Edward Said's term, as part of an ethical pedagogy, students will be moved to genuinely confront their positionalities as part of their critical practice.<sup>41</sup>

Given the origins of cultural studies, critical pedagogical practice should aim towards not only exposing cultural constructs at work, but also to move its proponents to create change where necessary. From the undergraduate, postgraduate and staff answers we have obtained, we extrapolate that the main desire of students is to *actively participate* in cultural studies, as well as to learn its theoretical underpinnings. Students need to understand their role in critical pedagogy through their own practices. They need to realise their responsibility in shaping intellectual and political thought; in turn, their awareness can be enhanced through the practice of transforming and translating theory into activity. Currently, the discipline of English and Cultural Studies at UWA is an example of a successfully integrated combination of literary analysis and cultural studies, but for cultural

studies to be fully appreciated as a methodological tool of practice rather than a purely analytical skill, students have noticed that it must be practised actively. Praxis, both in cultural studies pedagogy and the teaching of all disciplines, is therefore critical to developing a deeper symbiotic relationship between *knowing* and *doing*.

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—NOTES

We are indebted to our supervisors Stephen Chinna and Tony Hughes D'Aeth for their guidance, and our undergraduate students, staff and postgraduate colleagues at the University of Western Australia who patiently partook in our survey. Finally, we thank the CSR editors of this issue and two anonymous reviewers for their feedback and support of this project.

<sup>1</sup> Henry A. Giroux, 'Doing Cultural Studies: Youth and the Challenge of Pedagogy', *Harvard Educational Review*, vol. 64, no. 3, Fall 1994, pp. 278–308.

<sup>2</sup> John Hartley, 'Digital Scholarship and Pedagogy, the Next Step: Cultural Science', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 48, no. 2, Winter 2009, pp. 139, 140. See also Stephen Kemmis, 'Research for Praxis: Knowing Doing', *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* vol. 18, no. 1, 2010, pp. 9–27. Kemmis's article extends Hartley's work by arguing that praxis can only be properly investigated by researchers 'whose own individual and collective praxis is both their proper work and, at the same time, the focus of their critical investigation', p. 9. See also Jan Zita Grover, 'AIDS, Keywords, and Cultural Work', pp. 227–33, in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, London, 1992.

- <sup>3</sup> Nancy Barnes, 'The Fabric of a Student's Life and Thought: Practicing Cultural Anthropology in the Classroom', *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1992, p. 145.
- <sup>4</sup> For further commentary on pedagogy in an Australian cultural studies context, see John Frow and Meaghan Morris (eds), *Australian Cultural Studies: A Reader*, University of Chicago Press, Sydney, 1993; John Hartley, *The Uses of Digital Literacy*, Queensland University Press, Brisbane, 2009; Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Creative Practice and Critical Thinking' in Rod Wissler, Brad Haseman, Sue-Ann Wallace, Michael Keane (eds), *Innovation in Australian Arts, Media, Design: Fresh Challenges for the Tertiary Sector*, Post Pressed, Flaxton, 2004.
- <sup>5</sup> Matts Mattson and Stephen Kemmis, 'Praxis-Related Research: Serving Two Masters?', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, vol. 15, no. 2, July 2007, pp. 185–214. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to our attention.
- <sup>6</sup> Mattson and Kemmis, p. 187.
- <sup>7</sup> Mattson and Kemmis, pp. 192, 201, 205.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter F. Murphy, 'Cultural Studies As Praxis: A Working Paper', *College Literature*, vol. 19, no. 2, June 1992, pp. 31–43.
- <sup>9</sup> Murphy, p. 39.
- <sup>10</sup> Murphy, p. 39.
- <sup>11</sup> Henry A. Giroux, 'Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals', *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 2004, p. 61.
- <sup>12</sup> For further discussion on performance and pedagogy, see also Wendy Kohli, 'Performativity and Pedagogy: The Making of Educational Subjects', *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 18, no. 5, 1999, pp. 319–26; bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, Routledge, New York, 1994; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance*. Duke University Press, Durham, 2004 [2003]. Elizabeth Mackinlay describes a more practical use of performative pedagogy in 'Performative Pedagogy in Teaching and Learning Indigenous Women's Music and Dance', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2001, pp. 12–21. Mackinlay uses hooks's argument that the idea of performative pedagogy is 'meant to serve as a catalyst that calls everyone to become more and more engaged, to become active participants in learning' (hooks, p. 11). For more general resources on pedagogical cultures, see Patti Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*, Routledge, London, 1991; and Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (eds), *Handbook of Action Research*, Sage, London 2006 [2001].
- <sup>13</sup> Giroux, 'Cultural Studies, Public Pedagogy, and the Responsibility of Intellectuals', p. 73.
- <sup>14</sup> Handel Kashope Wright, 'Cultural Studies as Praxis: (Making) an Autobiographical Case', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 6, 2003, p. 807.
- <sup>15</sup> Giroux, 'Cultural Studies, Pedagogy, and Responsibility', p. 61.
- <sup>16</sup> This survey was conducted as part of the 2009 Postgraduate Teaching Internship Scheme at the University of Western Australia. Twenty-two students from the upper-level cultural studies unit

ENGL2218 completed paper questionnaires, and six postgraduates and ten staff members responded in writing or in person.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, p. 42.

<sup>18</sup> Ben Agger, *Cultural Studies as Critical Theory*, Falmer Press, London, 1992, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Green, 'The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies', in John Storey (ed.), *What Is Cultural Studies?*, Arnold, London and New York, 1998, p. 54.

<sup>20</sup> This international data, as with the Australian-based institutional data, was gathered from information presented on relevant departmental web pages of well-known universities across continents. No conscious parameters were observed other than the fame and, to some extent, high regard, of the institutions, and the presence of web pages in English. We would like to see a large-scale analysis of cultural studies in tertiary education around the world, so our suggestions may be expanded upon by more thoroughly evaluating course outlines in other institutions to borrow and derive new methods of putting cultural theory to practice. No doubt praxis is already in place and has been operating very successfully in many universities, with diverse curriculums and interactivity, but discovering where, how and why requires further research. We thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging us to clarify this important point.

<sup>21</sup> University of Hong Kong Comparative Literature Courses,  
<<http://www.hku.hk/complit/courses/courses.htm>>.

<sup>22</sup> Meaghan Morris, 'A Question of Cultural Studies', 1995, in Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing it All Back Home: Essays on Cultural Studies*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> It would be prudent here to note this as a potential bias in the study, as the students voluntarily enrolled in the unit, which may signal prior knowledge of, or at least interest in, the field.

<sup>24</sup> John Smyth, Geoffrey Shacklock and Robert Hattam, 'Doing Cultural Studies: An Antidote to Being Done To', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1999, p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> Smyth et al., p. 74–5.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Briggs, 'Culture & Pedagogy: On the Popular Art of Reviewing Popular Art', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, September 2007, p. 116–7.

<sup>27</sup> Briggs, pp. 117, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Agger, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> John W. Robertson and Sally Lee, 'Quality and Quantity': The Value of Online Seminars for Media and Cultural Studies Undergraduates', *Learning, Media and Technology*, vol. 32, no. 4, December 2007, p. 366.

<sup>30</sup> C.B. Lalli, and S. Feger, *Gauging and Improving Interactions in Online Seminars for Mathematics Coaches*, Brown University, Providence, RI, 2005. Available online at  
<[http://www.alliance.brown.edu/db/ea\\_catalog.php#G](http://www.alliance.brown.edu/db/ea_catalog.php#G)>.

- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Philip Bell on the *Philosopher's Zone*, 'Confronting Theory', 17 April 2010, ABC Radio National.
- <sup>32</sup> Alan O'Shea, 'A Special Relationship? Cultural Studies, Academia, and Pedagogy', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 4, 1998, p. 518.
- <sup>33</sup> O'Shea, p. 519.
- <sup>34</sup> O'Shea, p. 518.
- <sup>35</sup> Hartley, p. 141.
- <sup>36</sup> Wright, p. 808.
- <sup>37</sup> Barnes, p. 148.
- <sup>38</sup> Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, Verso, New York, 2004, p. 164.
- <sup>39</sup> Briggs, p. 125.
- <sup>40</sup> Briggs, p. 125.
- <sup>41</sup> Edward Said, 'The Text, the World, and the Critic', in J. Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, Methuen, London, 1979, pp. 161–88.