Sport Management Student as Producer: Embedding critical management studies in sport through contemporary pedagogy.

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Abstract

In recent years there has been growing interest over the role of major sport events and the sports industry. The aftermath of 2008 global crisis exposed the myth of "end of history" and raised several questions over the role of management and organisational practices and theories in all aspects of human activity, including sport. This article reviews the emergence of Critical Management Studies (CMS) as a field within management and organisational studies. We focus on Critical Performativity Theory (CPT) as a key concept of re-configuring managerial practices. We add our voices to those asking for more critical output in sport management and point out the potential contribution of CMS in sport and especially of CPT. Finally, we propose

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"Student as Producer" as a pedagogical framework to act as a possible basis for incorporating critical theories into higher education teaching. We argue that this framework can contribute significantly towards providing future graduates with the skills and knowledge to enable them to deal with the contemporary challenges of modern sport's industry and wider society.

1. Introduction

This paper argues that there is a need for a more critical pedagogy in sport management studies in higher education in order to help students to address some of the challenges within the industry. In order to support this, we offer an inclusive and enabling framework for higher education pedagogy which will support graduates to become more critically reflexive, flexible and better able to address the challenges that they are likely to face in the future.

Sport management studies have rapidly grown into a dynamic sub-sector of sport studies since their emergence in the 1960s (Jones & Brooks, 2008). Being distinctively detached from traditional management studies, due to sport's unique nature (see Smith and Stewart, 2010; Hoye et al, 2015; Pedersen and Thibault, 2015), the field became an important aspect of the sports industry. Since the turn of the century, there have been substantial debates in both its pillars – sport and management studies - but nevertheless these debates have yet to reach the core of sport management, with some notable exceptions (Amis & Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005; Shaw et al, 2008).

2. Background

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The world of organised sport has become the issue of controversy and opposition, especially since the mid-noughties. Politics, inequality, doping scandals and other controversies were always part of the agenda (Sugden and Tomlinson, 2002), but in the recent years the signs of social opposition to organised sports have multiplied. The Olympics, the biggest of all events, has come under enormous criticism for overspending and gentrification (Lenskyj, 2000 and 2008; Shaw, 2008; Giulianotti et al, 2012). A fundamental issue in this case, beside the growing opposition to Olympics from local societies, is the decreasing number of Olympic candidates. A similar story is developing with the World Cup with stories of exploitation and discrimination (Cottle, 2011; Grix, 2012; Gibson and Watts, 2013).

Beyond sport's esoteric issues, as those pointed above, the social and professional environment which sport management practitioners operate is changing rapidly. The global economic crisis of 2008 reshaped the financial, social and political landscape and especially the way we see our world. Fukuyama's "end of history" illusion was brought to an end (Fukuyama, 1989). Fukuyama predicted the end of history as such: "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (1989, p. 3). After the 2008 global economic crisis, it was apparent that markets, governments and enterprises ceased to operate according to the established rules of capitalism and global economy. Noam Chomsky commented on the collapse of the established norms of economics:

> "Actually one of the more interesting moments in the history of science and scholarship was actually in 2008. For, as you know, for decades economists had been claiming with extreme arrogance that they completely understood how to control and manage an economy. There were fundamental principles, like the

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efficient market hypothesis, rational expectations, and anyone who didn't accept this was dismissed as a kind of a, some strange kind of moron. The whole system collapsed, the whole intellectual edifice collapsed in a most amazing fashion it had no effect on the profession" (Chomsky, 2016)

Similar to Chomsky's comment on economists, management and organisation professions also remained relatively unaffected, despite the significant historical circumstance (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2012). The enormous growth of management field is accompanied by a troubling shortage of novel ideas and really strong contributions from academics in the field (Clark and Wright, 2009; Grey, 2010; Alvesson and Sandberg, 2012; Spicer et al, 2016). Alvesson and Sandberg (2012) argued that the consensus-challenging research in management is surprisingly rare and concluded that scholars should focus their efforts to "actively cultivate a more critical and path-setting scholarly orientation to research" (p.148). The debate within management studies had emerged from the start of the new century (Fournier and Grey, 2000). The established positivist, profit-oriented nature of management studies seemed insufficient to deal with wider social considerations, thus giving birth to Critical Management Studies (CMS).

Sport management studies still lack a consistent field of critical debate. Sport management studies are hitherto positioned at the "end of history" – in the Fukuyamian sense (Amis and Silk, 2005). The field – like the sport industry itself - is bounded to profit-oriented strategies and ideological axioms like "efficient-market hypothesis". Any approach to challenge the industry and these established norms in sport management quickly disappear from popular consciousness (Amis and Silk, 2005). Yet, in the post-2008 era there remain questions that still require answers. This article aims to review the key arguments in CMS debate and trace the elements of critical sport

management. We argue that sport management field should mobilise its resources and human capital to provide a critical response to its ever-changing socio-economic environment. Rather than simply adding our voice to the call for more critical research, we aim to provide a reasonable proposal through contemporary pedagogy.

3. Critical Management Studies

CMS is a field within management and organisational theory that questions the established institutional practices driven by profit-making. In practice, it aims to "challenge prevailing relations of domination – patriarchal, neo-imperialist as well as capitalist – and anticipate the development of alternatives to them" (Spicer et al, 2009). The emergence and rise of CMS came as a natural response to specific historical conditions such as "the New Right and New Labour; managerialization; the internal crisis of management; shifts in the nature of social science as well as specific factors concerning UK business schools" (Fournier and Grey, 2000, p. 8). CMS, since its establishment, has become a vibrant area of critique and confrontation between academics. For some, it failed to provide a solid alternative that would inspire a moral and social shift in the post-crisis era. Spicer et al argued that "While the global economy crumbled, CMS fiddled with footnotes" (Spicer et al, 2016, p. 243). Despite the apparent criticism, CMS remains a critical research-informed field of productive discussion.

CMS can be identified by three key characteristics: "de-naturalisation", non-performative" and "reflexivity" (Fournieu and Grey, 2000; Grey and Wilmott, 2005;

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Spicer et al, 2009). CMS authors have specific interpretations of terms. "De-naturalisation" means deconstructing the established "reality" of organisational life through questioning the "truthfulness of organizational knowledge by exposing its 'unnaturalness' or irrationality" (Fournier and Grey, 2000, p. 18). "Anti-performativity" opposes the "principle of performativity which serves to subordinate knowledge and truth to the production of efficiency" (Fournier and Grey, 2000, p. 17). "Reflexivity" denies the positivist approach of managerial and organisational studies, as a simplified approach to research and call for better integration of ideas. The above characteristics directly question established notions of management theory, like the *profit imperative* and the *efficient market hypothesis*, as accepted principles of human transactions. Alvesson and Spicer (2012) go further to suggest that the established organisational theory is based on non-rational and non-cognitive principles. They argue that organisations are governed by "*functional stupidity*; an inability and/or unwillingness to use cognitive and reflective capacities in anything other than narrow and circumspect ways" (2012, p.1201). This "functional stupidity" is characterised by lack of *reflexivity*, disinclination to require or provide *justification* and avoidance of *substantive reasoning*.

The above arguments point out the issue of performativity. As we have already mentioned the questioning of performativity, or anti-performativity, is one of the key characteristics of CMS and for many scholars (Spicer et al, 2009; Wickert and Shaefer, 2015; Spicer et al, 2016), a pivotal notion in reforming management. Spicer et al (2009) propose a critical performativity framework for communicating and acting in management. Instead of renouncing performativity, as suggested by Fournier and Grey (2000), they propose a set of tactics in order for management studies to become more affirmative, caring, pragmatic, potential focused and normative. The *tactics*

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which they propose in order to achieve these goals are, correspondingly: embracing ambiguity; working with mysteries; employing applied communicative action; exploring heterotopias and engaging in micro-emancipations (Spicer et al, 2009, p. 545). More specifically, by *affirmative stance* they argue that researchers should try to positively embrace the (often profit-oriented and labour-exploitative) ambiguity of established organisations and move beyond these constraining boundaries and get closer to the object of critique. With their second suggestion – *caring*, Spicer et al argue that researchers in management studies should seek to work with mysteries, rather than follow the theory-led protocol that dominates research. This process involves caring for views and possibilities, rather than affirming theories which have been taken for granted. With the notion of being *pragmatic* they propose adopting a more applied communication action, by "putting ideal speech aside" (2009, p. 550), in order to leave space for more participants to engage in debate and dialogue. By *potential focused* Spicer et al, propose engaging with the Foucauldian concept of *heterotopia* as a mean of studying potentialities, rather than actualities. This notion of *heterotopia* for Foucault, is the related to the quest of pragmatic examples from real world, rather than setting intangible utopic targets. Finally, Spicer et al propose a *normative* approach suggesting that CMS should focus on encouraging practitioners to engage in micro-emancipations in workplace that would benefit the social good, as "there is often limited space for large-scale revolutions" (2009, p. 553).

In relation to these five characteristics and tactics in achieving them Spicer et al (2009) suggest that CMS could actively contribute to social change through critical pragmatism, denouncing the claim that CMS lacked practical application. More importantly, Critical Performativity Theory (CTP) has become a radical platform for intervention in management, which could not be ignored. Spicer et al's (2009)

framework quickly became the focus of both concern and praise from the academic community, and without doubt it moved into the heart of CMS debate (Cabantous et al, 2015; Wickert and Shaefer, 2015). CTP raised concerns over its "practicality" and "materiality" (see Fleming and Banerjee, 2015; Gond et al, 2015; Cabantous et al, 2015). More specifically, Cabantous et al (2016) argued that "CPT has a very strong emphasis on discourse, and while actively intervening in managerial discourses is a worthwhile thing to do, organizations cannot be understood without cognizance of materiality, and materiality is as important within performativity theory as discourse" (p. 6). In other words, they argued that CPT ignores the materiality of discourse in performative processes.

Spicer et al (2016) responded to those critiques by clarifying the scope and engagement of CPT. Firstly, they argued that to engage critically with performativity it is necessary to pose the right questions: by focusing on the wider public interest and by adopting a more reflexive framework, which defies the instrumental constrains of current discipline. Thus, critical work can be influential both on an academic and practical level. They concluded that CMS needs to engage disgruntled elites, address a broader network of people through forums (activists, policy-makers, managers etc), attract resources (intra and extra-academic) and disseminate ideas to broader public in order to achieve a truly positive impact in the academic field and in everyday life. Wickert and Shaefer (2015) in the same rationale - of impacting managers' practice – proposed a framework of progressive performativity based on two interrelated processes: *micro-engagement* and *reflexive conscientization*. These processes involve engaging middle-managers in working methodically for "small-wins" - or as Spicer et al (2009) put it "micro-emancipations" towards goals related to Corporate

Social Responsibility (CSR) and ethical treatment. These small changes could lead to greater wins and contextualisation of managerial performativity.

The above characteristics can summarise a methodological and epistemological debate, over the nature of discourse, and the value of performance standards and success metrics in management studies. The significance of this debate can be found both in ethical (are managers doing the right thing?) and practical (is it the right way to do it?) level. Beyond the ideological challenge of managerialism and consumerism, CMS call for a more reflexive and inclusive framework that will enable future professionals and academics deal with the increasingly changing environment.

4. Towards Critical Management Studies in Sport

The issue of a more critical approach in management theory and practice also became the focus of sport-related papers. From the mid-noughties, academics have called for a more critical approach to sport management that would reflect to the ever-changing sporting environment (Amis & Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005; Zakus et al, 2007; Shaw et al, 2008). Most notably, Frisby (2005) questioned the lack of attention to the "bad and ugly" side of sport – corruption, environmental destruction, discrimination and inequality – from sport management scholars. She pointed out that the established positivist approach of sport management scholars was one of the sources of this omission and called for a steer towards critical social science (CSS) tradition. Frisby (2005, p. 5) offered critical social science as a paradigm, in sport management research, that would help sport managers uncover and understand the "bad and ugly"

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side of sport, in order for everyone to enjoy its good side. In order to integrate CSS into sport management research, Frisby went further to propose three tasks – earlier introduced by Alvesson and Deetz (2000): *insight*, *critique* and *transformative redefinition*. She used the example of Jennings' (1996) and Lenskyj's (2000) radical work on the Olympics as an example of "meaningful knowledge transfer in order to promote social justice" (p. 8).

This call for critical research echoed the lack of cultural plurality and reflexivity in sport management studies, which was also pointed out by Amis and Silk (2005). Consequently, they called for a sport management that "nurtures a broad-ranging interpretive vocabulary, theorizes the social, cultural, economic, political, technological, and ideological relations within contemporary existence, and critically engages with whichever theories and methodological strategies are useful within a particular empirical context" (p. 362). Still, they – among other academics – acknowledged the relative paucity of critical research in sport management studies (Frisby, 2005; Amis and Silk, 2005; Shaw et al, 2008).

In recent years, theory development of sport management emerged as the pivotal issue, in a way of extending the boundaries of the field and responding to contemporary challenges (Washington and Patterson, 2011; Doherty, 2013; Fink, 2013; Chelladurai, 2013). Notably, Doherty (2013) pointed out the importance of "good" theory and suggested a more inclusive approach to research, whether it is by borrowing, adapting, or extending the boundaries of the field. Still, the importance of integrating "good" theory into sport management, as previously expressed by Frisby, (2005) is usually translated into a closer collaboration between academics in sport management and sport social sciences (Love and Andrew, 2012).

Without a doubt, the work of CSS in sport - like Lenskyj's (2000, 2012) ground-breaking research on Olympics, or Sugden's (2013) critical left-realism and interventionism – can be of great significance in re-shaping any sport-related discipline. But, the scope of an emerging critical management studies in sport should also focus on applied practices in leadership – similarly to CMS approaches that discussed above. The notion of integrating critical theory into sport leadership, in order to promote inclusion and diversity, has already became a key issue for academics from the wider area of physical education (PE) and sport (Tinning, 2002; Tinning and Glasby, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Fitzpatrick & Santamaria, 2015).

More specifically, Fitzpatrick and Santamaria (2015) acknowledged the limitations of PE and of the wider area of sport, in marginalising those positioned as "different". They proposed an "Applied Critical Leadership" (ACL) – a multidisciplinary approach based on transformative leadership, critical multiculturalism and critical race theory - to be integrated into HE pedagogy. And further to reframing the curriculum and teaching of PE, they also called for an expansion to the "leadership distribution" of the field. They used the example of "Euro-centric stereotyping" – that non-white students are hailed as 'natural athletes' (see Carrington, 2010), which is widely reproduced in sport-related discourses as a mean of cultural hegemony. So for them, PE c be conceptualised as a field of practice and as such, any adaptation to it would require challenging and disrupting existing norms of behaviour. They concluded that in order for PE to operate as an inclusive field it requires both: a critical pedagogical framework that will incorporate contemporary social challenges, and a radical performative consideration of existing norms and discourses.

Fitzpatrick and Sanatmaria's (2015) arguments seem very substantial not only because they acknowledge the significance of critical pedagogy in reshaping the field,

but most importantly because they identify that this is not enough in a practical field (such as PE) without challenging the "embodied dispositions", or habitus (see Bourdieu, 1977; 1990). We could argue that Sport Management can similarly be predominately conceptualised as a field of practice as well. In that sense the contribution of CSS in the field would be (and are) quite significant, but could be inadequate without challenging issues around performativity. And while the debate in CMS intensifies over issues such as performativity (as mentioned above), there is a notable lack of similarly critical papers in sport management studies. This relative silence is not easily justifiable considering the growing sport scepticism (in CSS and HE) and the wider post-crisis debate.

The influential work of academics in CMS (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Spicer et al, 2009) can have great impact in sport management and especially the issue of performativity. A useful example to this could be drawn from Olympic studies and research done on its controversies, including our own (Lenskyj, 2000; Shaw, 2008; Zervas, 2012; 2016). Most of Olympic-opposing groups in recent years (composed by academics, environmentalists, architects, social activists, etc.) campaigned for issues concerning public space, environmental destruction, human rights and decision-making among others. In all the above cases the campaigners argued that the Olympic organisers - whether it was bidding or hosting - never really got into a discussion with the campaigners, needless to say they never involved them into the decision making process. This unwillingness, or incapacity, of Olympic organising committees to work with local communities, demonstrates the lack of flexibility and openness of sport managers and sport organisers to listen those affected most from their decisions. If local Olympic organisers – usually middle-managers – could work with campaigning groups, some of the controversies of such events could be dealt with in the interest of

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public good. But the organisational grids, the managerial job descriptions and the performance measures usually do not include such references.

The above example is characteristic of the lack of flexibility, of caring and of wider public sensibility often shown from sport organisers and managers. It is a matter of "functional stupidity" (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012) and goes down to issues professional practice and performativity (Spicer et al, 2009). How could sport managers, educated with the established goal-oriented culture and operating with non-reflexive performative attitude, embrace opposing views and non-normative behaviours? An answer to this could be by adopting a more affirmative, caring, pragmatic, potential focused and normative stance (Spicer et al, 2009); by focusing on wider public interest and promoting a more flexible and reflexive managerial framework (Spicer et al, 2016); or in other words: through critical performativity.

For us, the issue of critical sport management studies is not only a matter of inclusive research and informed theory. It is a matter of professional culture and foremost a matter of history-making. Its true essence lies in educational interventionism that will produce future practitioners and academics that can embrace opposition and differentiation, can operate ethically in the interest of public welfare and can act responsibly and decisively in times of political and social crisis. Therefore, we propose that a contemporary pedagogical approach that would incorporate the elements of reflexivity and critical engagement can make a real difference in sport management.

5. Towards a more reflexive framework – student-as-producer

Recent discourse in higher education has positioned students as consumers rather than willing learners (Molesworth et al, 2009). There has been an emphasis on neo-liberalist principles (Saunders, 2011) which has emphasised student satisfaction, value for money (Carey, 2013), competition and outcomes for students. Within this 'consumerist paradigm' (Carey, 2013: 251) the student is rebranded as a client of the university. In the UK student satisfaction is measured through the National Student Survey which reinforces a consumerist focus on satisfaction (Gibbs, 2010) rather than focusing on students' perspectives on engagement. This focus on consumerism assumes that students make purchasing decisions based on how satisfied they are with the services they receive. Universities see their students as sources of income and use this assumption to marketise the services they offer (Carey, 2013). However, there is evidence to suggest that whilst students may sometimes act as customers, this is not their prime motivation (Woodall et al, 2012).

The Student as Producer framework situates the learning experience as a co-production between students and their universities (Carey, 2013). It represents a direct challenge to managerialism (McCulloch, 2009) and consumerist principles and provides students with significant opportunities to take ownership of their curriculum and learning. The model essentially positions students as social agents; they are viewed as capable and confident and able to participate equally with lecturers in aspects such as curriculum design and knowledge generation. Within this framework, students are not only required to provide feedback on their experiences, they are required to actively engage in offering solutions to problems which they have identified. Rather than viewing students as passive recipients of knowledge, students are positioned as active producers of knowledge. The process of learning is given greater significance than the products of learning. Through active engagement in this model

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students learn to listen to offers, empathise, challenge and negotiate. They are required to take responsibility for their own education power imbalances between lecturers and students are eradicated.

The idea behind "student-as-producer", according to Neary (2010) derives from the writings of Walter Benjamin and Lev Vygotsky. In an essay titled "The Author as Producer" (1934/1973) Benjamin advocated a model of critical involvement by arguing that artists should not be concerned with the product alone but the means of production (Lambert, 2009). He demonstrated how spectators of plays could be turned into collaborators (Lambert, 2009), thus becoming active spectators. Benjamin later extended his thinking to the student experience when he expressed concern that the 19th century liberal humanist vision for university teaching was being eroded. He emphasised that the founders of universities had positioned students as teachers and learners at the same time (Benjamin, 1996). His concern was that the university had ceased to be grounded in the productivity of its students, as the founders had envisaged.

The Student as Producer framework can potentially create a 'rhizomatic' learning environment (Coley et al, 2012) in which educators and students weave away alongside one another in a non-hierarchical relationship. Within a rhizomatic model students can weave their own pathways. There is a sense of connectivity between students and between students and educators and the relationships between them are equal. Within a rhizomatic structure there are no limits to achievement. The learner is positioned as ever-growing, ever-moving and the role of the educator is re-framed as a facilitator of learning rather than a knowledge-transmitter. The students become experts in their own learning – they shape and re-shape their curriculum and they take responsibility for generating knowledge. Students as Producer represents a worldwide

movement of scholars and students against the neo-liberalist principles that higher education has unquestioningly embraced. The University of Lincoln is leading the sector in this area and in doing so is challenging the 'intellectual vandalism' (Neary, 2012, p. 2) caused by the increasing privatisation of higher education.

The Student as Producer model essentially positions students as partners in their education. Students are involved in all decision-making processes and student representation is embedded into all Committee structures. Educators and students co-plan the curriculum and students have significant ownership of the curriculum by helping to shape it. Additionally, students are given a significantly greater ownership of the assessment process and have greater opportunities to negotiate their own assessments. In addition to curriculum content and assessment students are given increasing responsibility to make decisions about when and how they learn. Power differentials between educators and students are switched; power is transferred away from the educator and given to the student so that students are able given greater negotiating power in relation to the content of programmes and modules, the teaching and the assessment process.

Conclusion

The term *performativity* was coined by Lyotard in his thesis entitled *The Postmodern Condition* (Lyotard, 1984). It refers to the emphasis on the use of outcome related performance indicators. These are frequently expressed as quantitative measures of performance which drive the modern education system through the use of narrow performance indicators which are then used to evaluate the effectiveness of educational institutions. Institutional performance is evaluated in quantitative terms

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and made public through publishing institutional data and naming and shaming those institutions which do not fare well. According to Ball (2003) 'performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change...' (p.216). Ball argues that the performative discourse has resulted in increased competition, incentives and the introduction of new forms of surveillance and monitoring processes designed to ensure that outcomes continually improve. Within this 'labyrinth of performativity' (Ball, 2003: 230) there is a high degree of instability, resulting in anxiety and insecurity. The wider field of sport studies and especially sport management are bound to established, and possibly outdated, notions of performativity.

Critical Management Studies (CMS) can provide a theoretical solution to the contemporary challenges of sport management studies. The Student as Producer framework is a suitable approach to facilitate the necessary changes and developments in research and teaching through embracing the principles of inclusiveness, reflexivity and flexibility. The idea of students becoming collaborators of knowledge in a research-engaged educational environment can provide a possible solution to the ever-expanding and rapidly changing landscape of sport management. The issues raised by CMS academics (Fournieu and Grey, 2000; Spicer et al, 2009) on performativity and reflexivity, along with the call for more inclusive (Doherty, 2013; Chelladurai, 2013) and more critical (Frisby, 2005; Amis and Silk, 2005; Shaw et al, 2008) sport management research, requires a radical educational approach, such as Student-as-Producer. The field of sport management education needs to be detached from the traditional profit-oriented "toolkits", or "recipes", which are insufficient for dealing with the economic landscape of the new millennium, and more importantly are detached from the contemporary social and economic challenges. Sport management

academics need to empower young researchers and collaborate with students in teaching and learning to give the field a new dynamic and a distinctive presence in sport studies.

Sport is changing. It is becoming less inclusive and less liberal and the 2008 crisis has had a detrimental impact on "grass roots" sport. In order to address the current and future challenges facing the industry there is a need to ensure that sports professionals operate ethically, critically and are able to generate solutions to problems. There is a need for these professionals to be adaptable so that they are able to be responsive to the challenges they face. We argue that a more critical higher education pedagogy is required in order to prepare graduates for these challenges. The Student as Producer framework provides a model which provides students with opportunities to take ownership of their curriculum and of their own learning. It provides a framework which positions the student as an active producer of knowledge rather than a passive recipient of an imposed curriculum. In addition to being an enabling pedagogy it provides students with opportunities to work democratically with lecturers, peers and those in more senior academic positions. Through this process students learn to listen to the perspectives of others, challenge and negotiate sensitively in the process of shaping their curriculum and generating new knowledge. We believe that the Students as Producer framework is potentially a model of higher education pedagogy which will enable future sports managers to operate more ethical, caring, democratic and authentic practice. As such, the application of this framework to sports management studies warrants further discussion.

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