

Management by textbook: The role of textbooks in developing critical thinking

Abstract

Critical thinking is widely regarded as a crucial capability for competent management, and also for any leadership role in society. In this paper we ask: how do textbooks play a role in the weakness of many management graduates' critical thinking skills? Management teachers can find plentiful advice about best teaching practices, yet the critical skills gap remains. We argue that the nature and use of management textbooks intersect and interact with students' epistemology to support a culture of surface learning, resulting in a failure to develop critical thinking skills. Textbooks reinforce under-developed student epistemology through limitations of content, and position students as passive recipients of an authoritative version of oversimplified knowledge. In our survey of 30 successful management textbooks, we found the majority of popular management textbooks potentially inhibit, or only weakly support, the development of students' capacity for critical thinking. The article concludes with suggestions for improving textbooks and textbook choice or considering alternatives.

Keywords

Textbooks, naïve realist students, student epistemology, management students and critical thinking.

Introduction

There is broad consensus that critical thinking skills are crucial to business decision-making for both managers and leaders (American Management Association, 2010; Flores et al., 2012). Such skills are not only important for managers but arguably for all citizens of a democracy (Giroux, 2002). Yet many researchers have expressed serious concerns about the incapacity of many management graduates to be able to think critically, reflectively, or even to think clearly (e.g. Lucas & Tan, 2013; Smith, 2003). Critical thinking¹ has many different meanings (Brookfield, 2012; Petress, 2004; Phillips & Bond, 2004). For this paper we accept there are many more meanings to “critical thinking” than only the usual one of “logic and argument”. Brookfield gathers these various meanings into five major groupings. He concludes that common to these five is: a) the uncovering of assumptions that lie behind ideas and action, and then b) assessing those assumptions for their appropriateness (Brookfield, 2012). We concur, recognizing that recent developments in philosophy highlight that critical awareness includes the ability to turn upon one’s own epistemological presumptions and thus extend critical thinking skills to critique taken-for-granted views of reality and hopefully open up new (emancipatory) possibilities (Hooks, 2010; Thayer-Bacon, 2003).

Despite plentiful literature advocating pedagogical and curriculum-based interventions to encourage and support critical thinking skills in students (e.g., Brookfield, 2012; Powley & Taylor, 2014; Smith, 2014), the deficit in management graduates’ capacity to think critically persists. One potentially overlooked contributor to this deficit may be the way that management and business students engage in learning from textbooks.

Our suspicion of the humble textbook arose from sharing our experiences of teaching graduate and undergraduate management students in the years following the merger of two

¹ Also called critical reflection (Phan, 2011; Phillips & Bond, 2004; Powley & Taylor, 2014)

culturally distinct institutions. We found a marked difference in the levels of critical thinking between the two student cohorts and also in the students' general predisposition towards learning. What seemed to be the most salient difference was the significantly higher level of textbook use in the Faculty we had joined. What we found was a student culture of learning based around textbooks, one that manifested in: increased focus on content that was assessable, a resistance towards reading beyond the textbook, a reluctance to relate or return to learning on topics covered in prior subjects, student feedback requesting a textbook instead of readings, an expectation that the lecturers' summary slides would contain all that was necessary to pass the subject, and a lack of interest in deep learning. Many of these were what Watson (1996) noted in his ethnographic exploration of surface learning in management education.

In this paper we investigate the role textbooks might play in shaping student learning culture and graduate outcomes. After establishing the central role of textbooks in much management education, we then examine why textbook use may be problematic and how the generalist nature of contemporary management education (particularly in its intensive and "executive" modes) amplifies this problem. We begin by exploring the role of textbooks in how they position students in their relationship to knowledge and the potential consequences of current practices. We then examine the literature on how students' prior learning experiences affect the ways they respond to the university learning environment in both their predisposition to learning and their epistemological beliefs, that is their ideas about what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired. Drawing on the rich literature on the development of critical thinking skills, we examine how textbooks may mediate this process by examining relevant critiques on the content of textbooks. We use this to construct an evaluative framework and use a sample of current textbooks to gauge the extent of the problems we have identified.

In much management education, textbooks play a pivotal role as mediators of both content and the process of its delivery. We argue that students can only develop critical thinking skills as their epistemological frameworks begin to move away from naïve realism and its associated instrumental, surface learning approach to knowledge. From both the literature and our survey, we find that too many management textbooks are not supportive of this necessary development of students' epistemology and therefore critical thinking. Instead, the widespread use of textbooks in much contemporary management education encourages a culture of surface and superficial learning.

Therefore, we conclude, the extensive use of textbooks in management education reduces the possibility of students developing critical thinking and so limits their ability to evaluate critically what they have learnt. This lack of questioning or reflexive praxis (Antonacopoulou, 2010) will affect management graduates' fundamental attitudes toward work and society (Greaney, 2006).

The role of textbooks in management education

Textbooks have a distinctive role as “books that are specifically written for use as class material designed to convey knowledge from broad aspects of a given field and suited to supplement lectures” (Nicholls, 2009, p. 31). In management, textbooks are often deliberately designed and written to be the main or even, the exclusive, reference and written learning source for the students in a specific subject. Leading textbooks come as a package (P.W. Richardson, 2004) including cases, questions for class debates or tests, lecture slides, and even videos, which signify to students that the text is the primary textual content for a subject.

For the increasingly stretched university teacher teaching an individual subject in a management education program, the use of a textbook may seem to be both an expedient and sensible approach to introduce new concepts given the wide scope of the subject matter. For

example, Anderson and Armbruster (1985) suggest that the ideal textbook should be designed to facilitate comprehension by organizing the material to be learned progressively, presented in a “clean” non-tangential layout, with clear illustrations and content that is commensurate with the reader’s ability to understand it. Textbooks, they continue, should also provide cues as to what information is important, and ensure that learning tasks explicitly relate to developing an understanding of the content. We question this vision of an ideal textbook in the context of management education because it fails to address the potential consequences of superficial learning, marginalization of alternative views and the over-simplification or neglect of key debates.

There is evidence that, for the vast majority of universities, a substantial percentage of the core units in business and management education courses are textbook-based. Brown, Rynes, Charlier and Hosmanek (2013) found that 30% of Organization Behavior (OB) courses in 241 MBA programs in the USA assigned an entire textbook, and 84% used a combination of textbook and readings. We found even higher levels from our own perusal of a cross-section of management subject outlines on the web, where textbook-based teaching was clearly the dominant approach.² When textbook-based subjects dominate the mode of delivery in management education they have the potential to become the major vehicle by which knowledge is organized and presented for learning. This effect of textbooks is not limited to students, as teaching staff may often find it expedient to use many of the complementary teaching tools that accompany textbooks. Too often, “teaching practices resemble the textbook characteristics”, though one might expect teaching “to complement or correct for” the textbook (Krammer, 1985, p. 277). Moreover, according to Krammer (1985), it is

² In a search using the terms Organisation and Management and syllabus, we collected a convenience sample of 30 recent course outlines from management degrees on the web. We found that all subjects provided a given set of readings. Yet only three subjects listed did not use a textbook as the primary reference. Around half added an occasional extra reading, usually landmark articles, and rarely enough to provide any sense of debates or that there may be more than one point of view. We acknowledge this may not be representative.

difficult to compensate for the effects of textbook based learning once it becomes part of a culture of learning, as students come to expect a certain approach.

How textbooks position students as learners

Textbooks convey more meaning than just their content. Drawing upon Foucault (1978) and Davies and Harré (1990), we argue that, as the textbook is implicitly positioned as the primary, legitimate and authoritative source of knowledge necessary for the student reader to understand a subject, it is not then the transparent medium of communication it is assumed to be; rather, it creates a relationship that is power-laden (Bogren, 2010).

Students' relationships to textbooks are formed well before university. Olson, considering senior school textbooks, observes that, "...texts have authority; they are taken as the authorized version of a society's valid knowledge" (1980, p. 192). Luke, de Castell and Luke (1983) support Olson, suggesting that most textbooks "frame knowledge in a form associated with neutral objectivity", which then undermines "...the reader's capacity to criticize" (1983, p. 114). Stylistically, de Castell, (1990, p. 85) finds chapters often present knowledge as being "factual" – "textbook knowledge ... is already preinterpreted, facts are...disengaged from their lived reality and re-presented as 'factual statements'." A potential consequence, according to Hardin, Dodd and Lauffer (2006, p. 430), is that "Textbooks are considered a powerful part of the educational process; students see texts as truth."

Thus, textbooks position students in specific ways, tacitly prescribing and proscribing particular ways of being and acting in the learning process. Ehrensals (2001) points out they are usually written in third person passive voice, with authoritative and imperative word usage, representing knowledge about a subject to students as authoritative, defined and accepted by mainstream experts. This form of writing textbooks is almost standard and has become a particular way of selecting and organizing knowledge that reinforces in many students a sense of being a passive receiver (Ehrensals, 2001; Myers, 1992).

By accepting their “position” as defined by the textbook, students may unconsciously adopt this subjective subordinate role as unequal receivers of knowledge, which removes the possibility of their challenging or questioning the textbook author as the giver of “ultimate truth”. Such students learn to accept that certain problems are constructed in the manner set out by their textbook and that their role is to therefore to reproduce this view. They are then highly likely to assume that no other legitimate or significant views exist outside this text.

Students may seek to reduce their anxieties by preferring a textbook written in an authoritative voice, as Clegg (2003, p. 376) notes:

And, students like answers—how many times have we heard that proffered as the reason why that oh so awful boring bland bad big book is the first year course text? It provides answers, it is a useful map, it doesn't take you where you'll get lost, all its regions are charted, with coloured pictures, pages and illustrations.

It is understandable that an introductory textbook may choose to ignore complex debates, but we argue, including key debates is crucial, because time limitations result in many management degree programs offering little opportunity to further development of the key concepts examined in foundation subjects. For example, a popular OB textbook opens its leadership chapter with the statement: “A decade ago [2001], 54 leadership experts from 38 countries reached a consensus that leadership is about influencing, motivating and enabling others to contribute to the effectiveness of and success of the organizations of which they are members.” (McShane, Olekalns, & Travaglione, 2013, p.384). While this logic of “consensus” is very persuasive, nowhere in the chapter was there a sense that leadership is a contentious topic and that outside *this* group of experts there is no consensus around leadership theory. Recently, Dinh et al. (2014, p. 59) concluded after an extensive review of leadership theory across 10 top-tier academic journals: “...no unified theory of leadership currently exists.” Students seeing the above statement in the textbook by McShane et al. are

positioned outside these debates about leadership. What is also missing is a sufficient history of the practice, ideas and theories of leadership and how these may be affected and shaped by economic, political, and cultural contexts. This lack of history and economic-social-political context is also evident in the presentation of other OB theories in the majority of textbooks we surveyed. This deficiency may have detrimental effects on students' learning for critical thinking. When theories are stripped of academic dispute, history and social context, we can expect a certain proportion of students to interpret their textbook content as uncontested, consisting of statements of enduring validity that apply to virtually any situation. As a result they are directed away from further inquiry.

A skilled academic may be able to introduce additional material into the classroom and nurture relationships that may counterbalance the deficiencies of a particular textbook. But this may be difficult for the average lecturer confronted by large classes, and where many students presume the key message is that "the students' responsibility is primarily to master [the] knowledge" in the textbook (Olson, 1980, p. 192). Thus, if textbooks are discursively positioned as the authoritative voice, the readers (students) are constructed as being in the role of recipients of authoritative knowledge. If textbooks often present material in ways interpreted (erroneously) by students as being certain, legitimate and to some extent closed, then they may not recognize that they may be missing much of what academic study has to offer. Only students with an already developed capacity to think critically are capable of recognizing the limitations of a curriculum that may, as Ghoshal (2005) suggests, contain ideologically inspired and amoral theories.

Thayer-Bacon (1997) recognizes the crucial importance of empowering students to question, particularly those who lack confidence, by providing a supportive and caring learning environment which open possibilities for mutual and critical exchange. She argues that such practices are deeply connected to students' development of a sense of self where the

responsibility for knowledge is shared and understood as something that is “socially constructed by embedded, embodied people who are in relation with each other” (p.245). As Gergen (2009) points out, this view recognizes that “knowledge [is] a communal construction” (p. 202) and “an outcome of relational processes” (p. 204). This relational epistemology is different from the instrumental, one-way, presentation of knowledge often implicit in textbooks.

Students’ “ways of knowing” - epistemology

Students’ prior learning experiences shape the way each student interprets new knowledge presented to them (Apple, 1992; Heikkila & Lonka, 2006), resulting in a particular approach to knowledge and learning – an epistemology. If students enter higher education with entrenched understandings about what knowledge is and how it is acquired, it follows that this will influence how they respond to textbooks. Robinson, Keltner, Ward and Ross (1995) found that initially, students tend to be naïve realists, or phenomenological absolutists. Such students have an “unshakable conviction that he or she is somehow privy to an invariable, knowable, objective reality – a reality that others will also perceive faithfully, provided that they are reasonable and rational.” These students tend to believe that they see the world exactly as it is, and regard conflicting viewpoints as simply representing a difference based on “...self-interest, ideological bias, or personality perversity” (1995, p. 405). In other words, such students are predisposed to dismiss other viewpoints as either suspect or wrong.

There are many models of student epistemologies (see Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; J. T. E. Richardson, 2013), which can be traced back to Perry’s pioneering investigations of students’ “ways of knowing” (Perry, 1970). Perry set out three common “ways of knowing”. The first he called “multiplicity”, which is similar to Robinson et al.’s (1995) naïve realists – where students start with an assumption that the world consists of absolutes, of right and wrong, correct and incorrect, as if handed down by omniscient authority; they therefore see other

views and ideas as incorrect, or caused by misunderstanding. The second Perry called “relativism”, where students may be ready to start learning critical thinking and recognize that alternative ideas and views exist, but are unsure how to handle these choices. The third way is “commitment” and has features recognizable as critical thinking, where students accept that there are many different views and start to recognize the underlying values and their own responsibility in judging these many choices (Perry, 1970).

Baxter Magolda (1992) found correspondingly similar “ways of knowing”, which she called the four stages of epistemological development (absolute knowers, transitional knowers, independent knowers and contextual knowers). Importantly, Baxter Magolda found that students tended to mature in stages moving from the early stage of thinking of learning as being remembering information, to a transitional stage where they increasingly began to accept the uncertainty of knowledge, finally becoming increasingly independent knowers who understand knowledge as mostly uncertain, able to recognize their own ideas as potentially valid as other authorities. In Baxter Magolda’s study, only a small percentage of students develop into Independent and Contextual Knowers by the fourth year of a program.

Phan (2011) argues this development is more easily achieved by students undertaking subject specializations in a three or four- year major, such as Psychology. The weight of evidence suggests that students develop epistemologically in stages as they progress through their degree programs, and that they only gradually shift from seeing knowledge as a collection of facts to being “contextual or ever evolving” (Palmer & Marra, 2004, p. 311).

The usual progression within a disciplinary context cannot be assumed in management education degree programs because their generalist and interdisciplinary nature precludes specialized mastery. Management education is distinguished from many other degree programs because students encounter a wider range of introductory subjects – Organizational Behavior, Operations Management, Human Resource Management, and so on. Their

generalist nature means that students constantly are returned to relatively introductory levels of understanding in which many disciplinary foundational concepts are stripped out. For example, Organization Behavior as studied in Business cannot assume the foundational knowledge of research methods, statistics, and physiology that can be assumed in Psychology students. Outside its postgraduate research streams, management education is not designed with the intention of the mastery of a specific body of professional knowledge (Barker, 2010) and many management subjects in both undergraduate and postgraduate management are essentially “designed for beginners” (Anthony, 1986, p. 119). These “beginner” subjects usually rely on a textbook, designed to be “introductory”.

Management students are “significantly more likely to have naive beliefs in simple knowledge” than students of other disciplines (Paulsen and Wells, 1998, p. 372). If the students’ patterns of learning are not disrupted by the challenges of advanced-subject content, these patterns may become reinforced. This is particularly so if the way that knowledge is presented does not communicate to students that knowledge is “tentative and evolving”. Instead, the unintentional message received by management students is that knowledge is “absolute, certain and unchanging” (Paulsen & Wells, 1998). Thus, when students who are naïve realists encounter course after course taught predominantly with textbooks that are positioned as the only or major authoritative voice, this can readily create a culture, such as that which Lea and Street (1998, p. 167) found where students’ “... overriding concerns were the texts they had read were authoritative and that they as students had little useful to say.”

Student ways of learning are also influenced by their motives for doing the degree in the first place. Ottewill (2003) concluded that students in general have become increasingly instrumental in approach, and that this is particularly evident in management students – wanting “education for business rather than education about business” (2003, p.192). Lucas and Tan (2013) found that the business and accounting students they interviewed were highly

focused on getting a “good degree”. Therefore, their interest was in the assessment requirements and what the lecturers said, “resulting in a lack of critique and reflective skepticism” (2013, p. 117).

Related is the literature on students using either a “surface” or “deep” learning styles (Entwistle, Hanley & Hounsell, 1979; Marton & Saljo, 1976). Deep learners seek to understand the material given for the subject, whereas the surface learners seek to remember by rote learning the material. Most surface learners find their self-defined “task” of learning to recall summaries of textbook material for each university subject can easily become tedious.

Students’ epistemology affects their motivation (Paulsen & Feldman 1999; 2005), approach to learning (Rodriguez & Cano, 2007; Phan, 2008), and capacity for critical thinking (Leung & Kember, 2010; Phan, 2008, 2011). As the students move away from naïve realism towards the more sophisticated stages of epistemology - starting to understand knowledge as complex and contextual - they adopt a deeper approach to learning, become more intrinsically motivated by their studies and begin to develop capacities in critical thinking.

Given it is widely recognized that a capacity for reflection and critical thinking is an essential part of the education of a good manager, many have recommended specialized courses to address the problem (Antonacopoulou, 2010; Mingers, 2000; Smith, 2014). Whilst stand-alone courses in critical thinking and reflection may be of benefit to students, as Antonacopoulou states:

...there is a need to support participants in their learning and development *throughout* [italics added] the MBA program, so that it can become a transformational experience equipping them with the confidence and capability to reflect and to question theory as much as they need to question their practice (2010, p. 10-11).

It follows that a capacity for critical thinking about management needs to be consciously developed; educators need to be aware that critical thinking is not only an orientation, but is also enabled through a slow process of cumulative development, during which students move towards a more sophisticated epistemology. It is only when students have a deep enough foundation of knowledge and can understand the core debates that define a field that they can critically evaluate its ideas. In the context of a very broad curriculum, students are constantly engaging with new subject content. When textbooks present knowledge in ways that encourage superficial learning, it will be difficult for the students to gain a sense of the provisional nature of knowledge. Thus, the core assumption of much management education –that a broad overview of a subject is all that is necessary for students to use this knowledge in practice – may be suspect.

Issues with content of management textbooks

In this section, we examine the specifics of textbook content, questioning both what is included, and what omitted. We then identify how the content of textbooks present knowledge in ways that may explain at least some of the difficulties management students have with developing their epistemology and therefore their critical thinking skills. A core problem is not just how the content supports naïve realist epistemologies, but what is *lacking* in the typical management textbook that might otherwise enable students to develop a more sophisticated epistemology.

Textbooks are often incorrectly represented as having up-to-date contents, though the contents no longer match the academic literature (Stambaugh & Trank, 2010). For example, Paul (1988) concluded that Psychology textbooks uncritically reproduced the main contents of earlier textbooks, even when that content had been demonstrated in the academic literature to be fundamentally flawed; the later critical literature being merely noted in the reference list. Almost all management educators will recognize Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which

appears and re-appears in textbooks. What does not appear in many OB textbooks is a discussion of the weak empirical foundation of this theory, being based on an analysis of 18 mainly written biographical accounts, of which only two were from women. Not only did Maslow subsequently revise his ideas, subsequent research had generally provided little support for its validity (e.g., Grant & Mills, 2006; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976). We still, like Watson (1996), encounter a surprising consensus among our students that Maslow is representative of motivation theory. As Tyson and Woodward (1989, p. 15) observe, “the core content and instructional techniques in textbooks change little from decade to decade, market demands result in layer upon layer of new content and special features.” This has real consequences for what management students learn.

A persistent theme in the literature is that management textbooks predominantly present a very particular, hegemonic view of management and neglect or exclude alternative ways of thinking about and doing business (Colby et al., 2011; Grant & Mills, 2006). The selective nature of textbooks, in simplifying a wider discourse, may silence, obscure, or even ignore important alternative accounts that might provide sources of doubt or critique for the students. As Keen observed about the economics curriculum:

...none of this [the major theoretical battles] turned up in the standard undergraduate or honours curriculum ... There were also entire schools of thought which were antithetical to conventional economics, which again were ignored unless there was a dissident on staff (2001, p. xiii).

For example, Kalmi (2007) found that material on economic cooperatives, which had prominence in a sample of pre-World War II economics textbooks, in later textbooks had markedly diminished in size and quality of the content, or completely vanished. Kalmi maintains that cooperatives are still economically significant, and therefore their neglect in more recent textbooks directs students away from ideas that offer alternatives to the currently

dominant ideas about economics. Bubna-Litic and North-Samardzic (2008) found strategy textbooks advocated dynamism and a future focus, but were in practice focused on the short-term and recent past. Disconcertingly, all either ignored ecological sustainability or treated it as an add-on, to be done only for competitive advantage if it met affordability criteria. Nowhere was there a discussion of the possible contradictions between ecological sustainability and unlimited economic growth.

Stambaugh and Trank (2010, p.673) argue that the textbook is a “highly institutionalized artifact” and a reflection of the cultural context of the institution, even if an imperfect one. In consequence, it is not surprising that a chorus of critical management scholars conclude that the global culture of management lacks the capacity to critically interrogate itself (Czarniawska, 2003). Proponents of Critical Management Studies argue that management textbooks are not neutral at all, but play a “central role” in “the systematic propagation” of the current ideology of management (Mir, 2003). This view suggests that the dominant management thinking which is represented in most textbooks “legitimizes certain power relations” where the “position of a manager is imbued with power and status”, this order being presented as historically logical (Mir, 2003, pp. 735 - 6). Mills and Helms-Hatfield (1999, p. 60) argue that “the business textbook presents a single – managerialist – worldview”. When such a limited view is presented in a textbook –centered subject, students may come to see this one view as the only one possible description of reality, not one of many possible views (Colby et al., 2011).

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) propose three isomorphic processes (mimetic, normative and coercive), which could be used to explain the recurrence of certain themes in textbooks and how textbook material becomes established, taken-for-granted and transmitted (e.g., Snyder, 2014, lists topics common to most OB and IM textbooks surveyed). This may not just apply to textbooks. Mizruchi and Fein (1999) provide evidence that American organizational

researchers generally tend to neglect coercive isomorphic processes, thus providing an incomplete picture of organizational phenomena. Further research is needed to establish how each of these isomorphic processes might be present in the construction of textbooks, and how the process of their construction involves a range of interdependent interests including authors, publishers, reviewers, the teaching staff who prescribe the text, the students, and wider forces such as employer bodies, corporate and government expectations and funding.

Once a textbook has been adopted by teaching staff there are significant costs in terms of time associated with any major change, as it requires significant effort on the part of teaching staff to relearn and present the new material. Most leading textbook publishers recognize the importance of the costs of switching textbooks and generously provide a range of additional teaching support materials, which subtly raise the bar. These materials tend to be extensions of the text material and therefore further legitimate the textbooks to students as the primary source of knowledge. The high costs of switching would be at least part of the explanation as to why successful textbooks continue to be published over many decades with only marginal changes, despite changes, advances and paradigmatic shifts in the academic literature.

A consequence is that management textbooks present a view of a field where a historically fixed perspective of the literature becomes perpetuated by presenting alternative or “progressive” items in marginal space where they are “mentioned” or “added in small separate sections, rather than replacing or totally reshaping the standardized, established, content (Apple, 1992, p. 8).

Survey of management textbooks

We gathered a convenience sample of 30 textbooks (see Appendix) consisting of 24 collected from our university library and recent desk copies from colleagues. To add to the representativeness of this group we included in our sample six books from the top 50 textbooks from Amazon US’s top sellers list (August, 2014). All were of recent publication

date and most had at least two editions, as a rough proxy for market success. There are obvious limitations in the representativeness of such a sample. Developing a representative sample of student textbook use presents substantial difficulties, including: sales numbers are less than robust measures and are apt to fluctuate; there is a vibrant, informal second hand market; there is an unknown number of illegally downloaded copies of textbooks; and it is impossible to measure students' varied use of library copies, not just for class, but also for assignment preparation. So, despite its limitations, we suggest our sample gives a reasonable enough approximation of the range of frequently used textbooks in management subjects to establish an indicative picture.

We chose a simple approach for evaluating and classifying the texts because our intention was to simply to gauge the extent of concerns arising from the literature. Based on our review of the literature we identified the following three broad criteria that would support the student readers being able to develop their capacities for critical thinking:

- 1) Multiple perspectives: that is, more than one perspective, view, or theoretical approach to the subject matter. In contrast, at the other end of the continuum is a singular perspective: the authors only offered the reader one possible way to "see" and think about the subject matter of the specific textbook.

- 2) Plentiful evidence of critique throughout the text: the authors routinely included issues, questions or problems raised by theories and practice, that is, these textbooks illustrated critical thinking for student readers. At the other end of the continuum is a lack of critique: the content did not inform, or suggest, to any student reader that there was, or could be, any substantive question or issue raised or fault found with the research itself or its application in practice. That is, these books did not model for the student learner what critical thinking looks like.

3) Contextualized content: the historical, cultural, economic, political and social context of the concepts, ideas, formal theories and techniques were made evident. In contrast, an a-historical and a-contextual view of the literature: the concepts, ideas and techniques were described or explained without adequately situating them in their historical location or any other aspects of their cultural, economic, and social milieu. (Note: Where textbooks glossed over early historical developments in a small separate section without integrating these ideas, or dismissing them as out-dated, we decided to categorize these as a-historical and a-contextual).

In order to carry out this survey, we set about checking the Contents pages and sampling the contents of each chosen textbook based on these three broad criteria. From this we consensually categorized each text. We found it was quite easy to identify those few textbooks that readily satisfied our three criteria, as these were incorporated throughout their text. The difficulty arose when we tried to create more categories to classify the remaining texts, because of their lack of consistency; the features we were seeking were not always evident as we sampled. After much discussion, we concluded the only fair treatment possible was to include them in one broad category. Therefore we have concluded that the following two categories best describe the textbooks surveyed for their overall level of support for developing students' epistemology and capacities for critical thinking:

A. Partial or Minimal Support. This grouping only patchily or partially met one or more of our three criteria. We interpreted this grouping as overall having insufficient support, in that students could easily pass over and ignore any supportive elements in the texts. We acknowledge that some of these texts could allow motivated teaching staff to use them to encourage student awareness of multiple viewpoints, a critical approach and an awareness of the role of time and place in management thinking and practice. At the extreme end of this group, we found a number of texts that had a

predominantly singular perspective, showed little or no critique, and provided no real historical or socio-cultural context to the theories or associated practice. These textbooks offered little or no support for the student learner in developing towards more sophisticated epistemology. We initially separated these latter into a third grouping, but decided that for our purposes the distinction was unnecessary, as our intention is not to single out particular texts but to provide a constructive critique.

B. *Substantial support*, in that student readers are encouraged to understand: there are different viewpoints of management and organisation, how ideas and practice can be questioned, and the role of time and place in affecting management. Students reading such textbooks would more likely become aware of a diversity of views, of the provisional nature of claims being made, and the historical development of ideas.

Findings

Insert Table 1. here

The survey results are set out in Table 1. Our finding that the vast majority - 93% in our sample - were *Partially or Minimally Supportive* suggests that the majority of textbooks do not pay enough attention to content that might assist a naïve realist student to start epistemological development and the learning of critical thinking skills. We were frankly surprised at how many textbooks offered only one view of management, that is, they did not consider the viewpoints of different actors in and around organizational domains, nor include more than one theoretical approach to any topic or issue. Of the many textbooks with a singular perspective, what struck us was the consistent assumption that management is to be seen only from the point of view of managers, and in particular the perspective of a top manager – a “managerialist point of view” with its “generic focus on improving the

efficiency and effectiveness of management practice” (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010 p.800). Our result confirms a similar finding by Mills and Helms Hatfield (1999) based on a content analysis of 107 textbooks. We noticed that this was often associated with an approach to presenting management as consisting of a set of understood, factual, technical skills to be applied. We also found that few paid more than passing reference to any historical debates and alternative conceptions, choosing to present the content as “given”, that is as unquestionable, fixed, authoritative. For example, statements like “In today’s fluid environment, success demands a competitive advantage. To achieve this, effective managers see change as basic to the survival of the organization.” (Bartol, Tein, Matthews, Sharma, & Scott-Ladd, 2011, p. 232) are not helpful in facilitating the development of a more sophisticated epistemology in their student readers.

We suggest there is a need to question the assumption by many textbook writers and textbook selectors that packing textbooks full of highly simplified material leads to appropriately educated managers. Highly simplified material may support commencing naïve realist students towards lower levels of learning (Bloom et al., 1956). But it also leads to content stripped of context, complexity, uncertainty, disputes, and multiple perspectives. It is these latter features that support student development towards critical thinking.

Only two textbooks, representing 7% of our sample, contained a variety of perspectives, so offering more than one possible way for a future manager to “see” their world; located each topic in its context – historically, culturally, economically, socially; *and* included critical discussion interwoven through the content. These two examples indicate it is possible to construct textbooks to support epistemological development and critical thinking.

Impact on the learning culture

If enough students commence management education with naïve views of the world and an instrumental approach to their studies, they are likely to reinforce each other’s naïve realist

and surface learning assumptions about what and how they should be learning. This may limit the potential for pedagogical influence of the instructor of any single subject in a course. Instrumentally motivated students tend to expect reproductive-style assessments and didactic lecturing (Ottewill, 2003), and will rate highly those teaching staff who comply with their preferences (Kember, Jenkins & Ng, 2003). Individual lecturers responding to these student expectations by providing the typical management textbook (as we explain in our Survey), unintentionally help support and thereby further cultivate this approach to learning; particularly as the textbook becomes a significant guide to what is expected to be learnt and reproduced for assessments. Once this mode of learning becomes normalized for a student cohort, individual academic teachers who introduce alternative viewpoints, debates, and uncertainty may experience student resistance for not fitting in with the culture's downloading system of knowledge transfer as opposed to learning as generative (Wittrock, 1974). Carrell and West (2010, p. 430) found that "student evaluations rewarded professors who increase achievement in the contemporaneous course being taught, not those who increase deep learning." They speculated that this might be related to students developing (good or bad) learning styles depending on how their introductory course is taught – and here the use of textbooks may be critical.

The number of students per academic are increasing (Starkey, Hatchuel & Tempest, 2004) and thus it becomes more and more challenging for teachers of large classes to establish the supportive, caring, relationships with their students which "will help students become knowers able to participate in and contribute to the knowing process" (Thayer-Bacon, 2003, p. 249). These economically driven factors limit the possibility of individual teachers addressing the students' epistemological development; instead they support a culture of surface learning where textbooks play an increasingly significant role. As students become enculturated into a particular view of what education is, and what management is (the

application of packages of techniques, uncritically accepted and used), this view is likely to diffuse into the business community. After graduating, this stance would be reinforced by those institutions that do not encourage questioning of their existing practice frameworks, and reward conformists rather than those who question the “given” practice of management “in the field” (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012).

Conclusion

There have been numerous concerns expressed about management education over recent decades. Many focus on the pedagogical relationship between curriculum and the capability of graduates to practice management, but they also extend to the very ethos that management graduates bring to society in terms of their narrowness of vision and complicity in undermining democratic values and supporting institutionalized injustice. The causes of these concerns include: course content (Rubin & Dierdorff, 2013); the relevance of management theories to management practice (Pearce & Huang, 2012; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006); the empirical basis of management theories (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011); the moral implications of management education (Ghoshal, 2005; Lissack & K.A. Richardson, 2003); lack of sustainability (Shrivastava, 1994) and the nature of theorizing (Rousseau, 2012). The breadth and consistency of these ruminations has led some to “wonder whether business schools ...can do anything well” (Arbaugh 2010, p. 280). These concerns should be of lesser significance if management graduates had developed critical thinking skills.

We argue that the task of business schools has evolved into one where economic pressures have led to broader *and* shorter-length degrees and often a greater number of students per academic. The benefits of this international, market-orientated education format need to be assessed against the potential costs for society, business and the credibility of universities themselves if the outcome is graduates who have only superficial and surface learning and an undeveloped epistemology. Textbooks are only one aspect of this problem,

but we have shown in this paper it is easy to overlook the significant role textbooks are likely to be playing in mediating much of what management graduates have learnt. We have argued that the instrumental motivation of many management and business students and the broad multi-disciplinary nature of the management degrees create a context in which the widespread use of textbooks can significantly impact on graduates' ability to reflect and think critically about what they have learnt. Instead of presenting knowledge in ways that are widely regarded by educators to be essential to the development of critical thinking, we found that the majority of a sample of textbooks contained only a singular perspective, generally omitted important alternative views and critiques of concepts, and tended to present concepts and theories without adequately situating them in their historical, cultural, economic, and social milieu. This practice is encouraged when publishers advise writers to produce textbooks with content designed for ease of learning for introductory students.

If management educators are to engage seriously with developing critical thinking we suggest they need to consider how their textbooks might be used in practice by students. Management educators need to be aware of, and critically reflect on, the role textbooks may play in limiting (or developing) critical thinking as well as supporting (or not) a student culture which values quick learning, an uncritical acceptance of apparently neutral management techniques, and didactic teaching focused on assessment ease. We encourage publishers and textbook writers to reflect on how textbooks might contribute to the development of critical thinking and we offer the following as ways in which the issues we identified could be addressed:

a) Writing textbooks so that the student can make informed choices about the knowledge presented. There are a number of ways in which this can be achieved. First, by presenting concepts and ideas from different perspectives, not just those of the dominant stakeholders. Drawing on Watson (2001), we suggest that textbook narratives could be

expanded to include counterpoints, for example, respectfully reflecting other perspectives than those in the interests of management. Second, by providing a sense of the intellectual development of ideas and how different contexts have privileged different ideas over time (this will not be easy, given the jungle-like nature of management theorizing). Finally, paying attention to the positions of major competing perspectives rather than assuming that there is only one right view. For example, psychodynamic theory continues to have marginal status in organizations and management studies despite its richness and historically significant contributions (Fotaki, Long & Schwartz, 2012) and significant explanatory power (see Arnaud, 2012).

b) Facilitating the development of better textbooks also means acknowledging that textbook writing is significantly undervalued and excellent textbooks need to be recognized as important and worthy academic contributions. This means valuing textbooks that have content carefully designed and written to encourage the students' epistemological development. It also means raising awareness that using "market success" as a proxy for quality in textbooks needs to be revisited.

While we have identified a need to improve the content and style of textbooks in relation to critical thinking, at the heart of our critique is also how they are used in management education. The few textbooks we found in our survey which were written in ways that we believe facilitate the development of critical thinking invited students to learn more slowly, and to engage actively with the material presented so that they could recognize the value of the wider debates about management.

c) Teaching staff can provide students with a collection of specific key readings from the literature, either in printed or e-format (see Snyder, 2014). The collection should confront students with a patchwork of ideas about a topic, and acknowledge different views, and therefore communicate how knowledge is constructed and that it is always incomplete. For

many students this may be both daunting and confusing compared to the clear structure and simplified language typically found in textbooks; however, a collection of readings is more likely to give the student a sense of the size and complexity of the academic enterprise in a way that leaves them more open to alternative points of view.

Textbooks in management education can be thought of as the maypole around which swirl other components of university teaching and learning. While we encourage management educators to become aware of the shortcomings of many current textbooks, it is crucial that other systemic factors are also addressed. There is a need for a collective re-evaluation of the curriculum *as a whole* to examine how critical thinking might be encouraged, and teachers supported in these efforts, even if students are initially resistant. Further research is also needed to address how realistic it is to expect our students' critical thinking to develop without their engaging with the foundational ideas essential to understanding the underlying disciplines. Also, we should consider whether it is reasonable that management degrees are shorter than the specialized disciplines upon which management knowledge and practice rely. Changing our attitude to textbooks should become part of a larger cultural change in management education.

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APPENDIX: Textbooks Surveyed

- Bartol, K, Tein, M., Matthews, G., Sharma, B., & Scott-Ladd, B. (2011). *Management: a Pacific Rim Focus*, 6th ed. North Ryde, NSW: McGraw-Hill Australia.
- Bateman, T. S., & Snell, A, S. (2011). *Management: Leading and Collaborating in a Competitive World*, 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- Boddy, D. (2014). *Management: An Introduction*, 6th ed. Harlow, UK: Pearson Education.
- Campbell, D., Edgar, D., & Stonehouse, G. (2011). *Business Strategy: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Coulter, M. (2013). *Strategic Management in Action*, 6th ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Daft, R. L., & Marcic, D. (2014). *Building Management Skills: An Action-First Approach*. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning.
- David, F. R., & David, F. R. (2015). *Strategic Management; Concepts and Cases: A Comparative Advantage Approach*, 15th ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Dess, G. G., Lumpkin, G. T., Eisner, A. B., & McNamara, G. (2012). *Strategic Management: Text and Cases*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.
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- Hitt, M. A., Miller, C. C., & Colella, A. (2011). *Organizational Behavior*, 3rd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

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- Jones, G. R. (2010). *Organizational Theory, Design and Change*, 6th ed. Upper Saddle River, N J: Prentice-Hall.
- Kinicki, A., & Williams, B. K. (2013). *Management: a Practical Introduction*, 6th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- Lehman, C. M., & Dufrene, D. D. (2011). *Business Communication*, 16th ed. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning.
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- Snell, S. A., & Bohlander, G. (2013). *Managing Human Resources*, 16th ed. Mason, OH: Cengage Learning.
- Thill, J. V., & Bouvee, C L. (2013). *Excellence in Business Communication*, 10th ed. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Thompson, A. A., Strickland, A. J., Gamble, J. E., & Gao, Z. (2013). *Crafting and Executing Strategy: The Quest for Competitive Advantage: Concepts and Cases*, 19th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Irwin.

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Table 1.*Level of Critical Thinking Support*

Substantial	Partial or Minimal
Boddy (2014); Wilson (2010).	Bartol, Tein, Matthews, Sharma, & Scott-Ladd (2011); Bateman & Snell (2011); Campbell, Edgar & Stonehouse (2011); Coulter (2013); Daft & Marcic (2014); David & David (2015); Dess, Lumpkin, Eisner, & McNamara (2012); Greenberg (2010); Griffin (2011); Griffin and Moorhead (2014); Hill and Jones (2013); Hitt, Miller, & Colella (2011); Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson (2013); Jones (2010); Kinicki & Williams (2013); Lehman & Dufrene (2011); McShane, Olekalns, & Travaglione (2013); Morrison (2011); Nelson & Quick, (2014); Newstrom (2011); Plunkett, Allen, & Attner (2013); Rothaermal (2013); Snell & Bohlander (2013); Thill & Bouvee (2013); Thompson, Strickland, Gamble, & Gao (2013); Wheelan & Hunger (2012); Williams (2011); Wood, Zeffane, Fromholtz, Wiesner, & Creed (2010).