

## Praxis: A Student Experience of the Behavioural Science Internship Conference

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*In this paper I critically reflect on my experiences of contributing to the conceptualisation, development, and delivery of the Behavioural Science Internship Conference as an undergraduate student. Behavioural Science at the University of Notre Dame Australia is situated within a collaborative, strengths-based, empowering, process-focused praxis which problematises the oppression inherent within the meritocratic assumptions, imposed outcomes, and competitive discourse that underpin the dominant educational paradigm. I explore why tensions pervaded my experiences of the conference process, and conclude that Behavioural Science praxis is marginalised as a result of socialisation within the dominant educational paradigm, and because the degree and internship are embedded within the confines of the paradigm they seek to transform. My reflection provides a resource for students and 'educators' to understand and advocate for pedagogies and praxis that support social justice.*

Freire (1970, 1973) argued that pedagogical processes should promote liberation by facilitating each person's in-depth awareness of how prevailing socio-political, institutional configurations oppress them. He termed the process conscientization. The process of conscientization is empowering in itself because it allows people to develop mindfulness of the insidious ways that dominant discourses become internalised, and the implications this internalisation has in encouraging people to inadvertently collude in their own oppression (Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970, 1973). Conscientization in turn empowers people to work together in ways that resist oppression, and engage in dialogical processes to transform unjust power relations and develop socially just alternatives (Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970, 1973).

In this paper I draw upon the work of Freire to critically reflect on my experiences contributing to the conceptualisation, development, and delivery of the Inaugural Behavioural Science Internship Conference as an undergraduate student. Behavioural Science at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) is situated within a collaborative, strengths-based, empowering, process-focused praxis. This praxis problematises the oppression inherent within the meritocratic assumptions, imposed

outcomes, and competitive discourse that underpin the dominant educational paradigm. I begin by discussing the oppression inherent within the dominant educational paradigm, and how the praxis of Behavioural Science provides an alternative socially-just framework. This provides the context for my critical reflection of the conference process. My reflection provides a resource for 'students' and 'educators'<sup>1</sup> to understand and advocate for pedagogies and praxis which authentically support social justice.

### **The Oppression of the Dominant Educational Paradigm**

The paradigm of Western formal institutionalised education gained hegemony worldwide through the education policies and practices of Western societies and their export under colonialism (Marginson, 2006; Van Krieken et al., 2006). Although education is widely cited as a solution to social inequalities, the meritocratic assumptions, imposed outcomes, and competitive discourse that underpin the dominant educational paradigm are inherently oppressive (Hill, 2009). Meritocracy erroneously attributes success entirely to an individual's hard work and talent, and thus misleadingly assumes equality of opportunity, and discounts the influence of socio-historical barriers to success (Van Krieken et al., 2006). Meritocracy has been

used to legitimate the homogenous treatment of students “as fair, principled, and lacking in prejudice” (Augustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005, p.315). Treating those in unequal positions as equal however, serves to entrench inequalities.

Studies over time have upheld the notion that the way education is structured in schools and universities inculcates a constellation of implicit understandings (Hill, 2009; Marginson, 2006; Van Krieken et al., 2006) such as acceptance of hierarchy, mindless competition, blind obedience, apathy, and motivation by contingent external rewards; these have been termed the hidden curriculum (Bergenhengouwen, 1987; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Gatto, 2005). University students can resist the oppression of the hidden curriculum if they emphasise the value of study in terms of enriching their personal development, relationships, and opportunity to solve social problems (Bergenhengouwen, 1987). However, it is the exchange value of study; maximising results with minimum effort, such as obtaining high grades, or prestigious highly paid jobs that students have been socialised into during their compulsory schooling (Bergenhengouwen, 1987). Consequently, resisting the hidden curriculum is difficult. Moreover, according to Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital, the hidden curriculum involves the cultural reproduction of the values and ideology of the dominant ruling classes in society, which marginalises those whose social milieu habituates them into alternate tastes, manners, modes of communicating, and aspirations (Hill, 2009; Pressler, 2009; Van Krieken et al., 2006).

A key component of the hidden curriculum is the erroneous assumption that learning involves top-down ‘transmission’ of knowledge from educator to students (Malcolm & Zukas, 2001). Problematically, students as co-constructors of knowledge are delegitimated (Freire, 1970, 1973; Tuffin, 2005). Moreover, knowledge is routinely presented as objective and universal within dominant educational discourse, which leads to widespread failure to scrutinise the values and power dynamics that are being

endorsed through this production of knowledge, and results in the dominant educational paradigm developing impunity (Elfin, 2008; Gergen, 1973). People internalise aspects of the dominant educational paradigm so that they inadvertently think and act in ways consistent with it and therefore become participants in their own oppression (Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970, 1973). Indeed, “developing techniques that make self-disciplining an unreflexive act of the social ordering of the knowledge-power nexus” (Beilharz & Hogan, 2006, p. 457) is an important aspect of a Foucaudian understanding of governmentality in modern society (Goodwin, 1996).

### **The Values-based Praxis of Behavioural Science**

The Behavioural Science degree at UNDA is an innovative approach in that it is dedicated to the pursuit of social justice for all persons and peoples. It is informed by a convergence of the lenses of critical psychology and community psychology. Social justice is conceptualised as consisting of liberation and holistic wellbeing. Liberation and holistic wellbeing are best supported when people have capacity for self-determination and relationships are characterised by egalitarianism, procedural fairness, and norms of mutual support (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Moreover, to be socially just, society must respect diversity, and be structured to promote equity and equality; facilitate opportunities for each person to have a voice in political and social processes; and provide access to health and education services that reflect their needs (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

Behavioural scientists from UNDA work collaboratively with communities to deconstruct the silence, invisibility, and exclusion that characterises oppression. Action to redress injustice must occur within the context of a strengths-based, participatory process which is ‘owned’ and driven by those experiencing oppression. Dominant paternalistic ‘helping’ paradigms, such as

training marginalised persons in adjustment and coping strategies, are rejected. These uphold oppressive powerful/powerless dichotomies, and can erroneously imply that there is something wrong with the person, rather than addressing the root cause by transforming the unjust context (Drew, Sonn, Bishop & Contos, 2000; Prilleltensky, 1997; Prilleltensky & Fox, 2007; Ranzijn, McConnochie, Clarke & Nolan, 2007).

Continually striving to better understand subjectivity and develop critical reflexivity is integral to the praxis of Behavioural Science, as research exploring moral exclusion suggests that a more robustly inclusive social identity is predictive of beliefs that each person is entitled to belong within the 'moral community' just behaviour is owed to (Clayton & Opatow, 2003; Opatow, 1990). Linked to this, imagining accountability for unforeseen consequences of actions or inaction stimulates more complex, in-depth reflection, making unforeseen consequences foreseeable, and catalysing more ethical praxis (O'Neill, 1989). Critically questioning how power relations operate in different contexts to transform unjust power relations, and develop alternatives that authentically support social justice, is the essence of Behavioural Science praxis.

#### **The Behavioural Science Internship Unit and the Conference Task**

The Internship unit is undertaken in the final semester of the Bachelor of Behavioural Science at UNDA. The Internship Co-ordinator structured the unit requirements to support transformative learning and social justice. There were opportunities for students enrolled in the unit, and others exposed to the unit through the internships to engage in meaningful dialogue about the values-based praxis of the course as an alternative to paradigms that support unjust power relations. Students, university staff, and the human service agencies that hosted student interns could integrate theoretical knowledge from the degree with practical experience and obtain

constructive feedback from each other about strengths and areas of both agency practice and the degree that could be improved.

During the semester, students completed a minimum of 90 hours of voluntary work (since increased to 150 hours) with an agency engaged in projects or tasks relevant to the course. The values-based praxis was enacted by assigning students the responsibility for undertaking research to identify and acquire a placement. We each negotiated a learning contract with our Agency Supervisor, and in consultation with them, we determined both the learning goals we wished to achieve and the types of activities we would be involved in to realise these goals.

The remainder of the unit supported a structured process of critical reflection about the relationship between activities undertaken during placement and aspects of the values-based praxis of Behavioural Science. We each kept a reflective journal that was emailed to the Internship Co-ordinator each week, and participated in seminars as a class each fortnight. Seminars provided workshops in generic professional skills, and a forum to share and re-evaluate experiences encountered during placement with fellow students. The Internship Co-ordinator developed meaningful tasks for us to complete that utilised skills facilitated during the workshops and she provided feedback to consolidate our learning. These tasks included preparing a job application, submitting a report to the Internship Co-ordinator and our Agency Supervisor on the learning as a result of our placement, and working collaboratively as a class to conceptualise, develop and deliver an academic conference.

The conference was themed *Living the Recession: Reconceptualising Poverty*. Our Agency Supervisors were invited to attend, and invitations were extended to the staff within the School of Arts and Sciences and to the second year Behavioural Science students. In accord with the collaborative, strengths-based, empowering, process-focused praxis of Behavioural Science, the task was structured so that we were responsible for our own learning as

individuals and as a collective. The Internship Co-ordinator determined the conference theme and set broad parameters for the task. She held us accountable for the processes that we implemented throughout. However, rather than being prescriptive, the Internship Co-ordinator deployed herself as a resource with expertise we could access and cultivated the space for us to critically evaluate and learn from our experiences.

The Internship Co-ordinator divided aspects of the conference into five groups. These were: a conference organising committee and keynote address, interactive roundtable, interactive poster session, interactive workshop, and plenary. We drew out of a hat to determine the group to which we were assigned and the five students in our group. This process was procedurally fair as no one was given preference over anyone else in selecting the tasks they were responsible for or the members in their group (Drew, Bishop & Syme, 2002). Moreover, it provided an opportunity to practice teamwork skills necessary in the workplace since most employees cannot always choose who they work with and the tasks they undertake. The Internship Co-ordinator provided a general outline and timeline of tasks each group needed to undertake. Each group developed a project proposal and budget, which outlined the rationale and structure for their session, and chose a liaison person to act as a conduit of information, questions, and feedback to ensure that the entire conference flowed.

#### **Experience of the Conference Process**

As developing critical reflexivity is integral to ethical praxis, there was a strong rationale to write a paper which critically reflected on the experience of the Internship unit and the conference task from my perspective as a student. However, I was initially uncomfortable with writing a reflective article. Personal reflection is situated outside the dominant positivist paradigm of science as objective and universal (Drew et al., 2000). Consequently I

positioned a reflective paper as ‘not academic enough’, which linked to underlying doubts that as an honours student I am not sufficiently ‘intellectual’ to belong in academia (Fleming, 2006). I harboured concern that my peers, the lecturers who have mentored me throughout my degree, and the course itself would be judged poorly if I criticised publicly my experience of the conference.

As I began to question my reluctance further I realised that I was invoking the dominant educational paradigm by constructing the personal and student voice as not legitimate and viewing critique solely in terms of negativity. Being open to constructive criticism is necessary to avoid the marginalisation inherent in dogmatic approaches. Ultimately, my reluctance was constructive because it catalysed critical exploration of how the dominant educational paradigm inculcated tensions throughout my experiences of the conference.

When the Internship Co-ordinator introduced the conference task, I remember looking around the room and seeing everyone initially hang back, pens poised, when she invited ideas for aspects of the conference theme we could potentially focus on. Our degree is situated within an epistemology of co-construction and dialogical exchange and we had previous experience developing ideas for projects and working in groups for many of our assignments. Yet, it was as if we were waiting for clues about what was *really* expected of us, which was perhaps partly because most of us were unfamiliar with an academic conference. Although our degree is structured to minimise a dichotomous knowledge-power relationship between educators and learners the fact remains that educators retain greater power through their role in developing curriculum, and grading assignments and exams. Thus, our responses were also indicative of the dominant educational epistemology in which we understood ourselves, the ‘learners’, as empty vessels who receive knowledge transmitted by ‘experts’. This response only persisted momentarily as we began to tentatively grapple with the task. However, our

hesitancy in the face of an empowering opportunity to exercise self-determination in our learning was indicative that our disempowerment as students is deeply entrenched and insidious within the dominant educational paradigm.

I was assigned to the plenary. There was strong consensus that our group should meet in person each week due to our lack of familiarity with the task, and notions that close collaboration would strengthen our session. Scheduling meetings was difficult when we were all undertaking placements across Perth and in the final semester of our degree. Logistically, we were dealing with similar time and availability constraints that would characterise most workplaces. Beyond issues associated with the practicalities of the task, our group reflected on the ethical issues of having to do the task in the first place. We recognised that the strengths-based, empowering, collaborative, process-focused praxis that the task was situated within had the potential to foster transformative learning. Yet paradoxically, our participation was compulsory, which is problematic in terms of the way self-determination is understood as central to liberation and holistic wellbeing.

An enriching dynamic evolved where our group meetings became a safe space to discuss and reflect on what we were learning through our placements and some of the challenges we were encountering. These discussions and reflections broadened to encompass other aspects of professional development. We collectively attempted to make sense of how what we were undertaking in terms of the conference, other university tasks, paid work, and other roles fitted into what it meant to be a behavioural scientist, and what we anticipated and wanted in terms of career pathways. Although we discussed these issues in the seminars, the constraints of a larger audience and being observed by the Internship Co-ordinator meant that these discussions were less open and in-depth than our peer meetings. As I reflected on our processes to write this

article I became aware of literature demonstrating the efficacy of peer meetings to provide this kind of collegial support and mentoring (Gimbert, 2001; Schaub-de Jong, Cohen-Schotanus, Dekker & Verkerk, 2009). Ironically, a group function we understood as valuable but peripheral to the conference may have been the very learning experience the Co-ordinator structured the task to foster. We remained attuned to the imposed outcome of the conference as the 'legitimate' purpose of our meetings, expressing sentiments such as "Anyway, we better discuss what we're actually supposed to".

An overarching theme in our group experiences was the importance of developing tolerance for ambiguity. As resources, not 'experts', behavioural scientists must work with communities so that disenfranchised collectives can gain empowerment when and how *they* perceive that they need it (Freire, 1970, 1973). Authentic praxis implies ambiguity as each community is unique and initiatives must be community owned and driven. Undertaking the plenary replicated some of these issues as we needed to draw on issues that had been raised across the conference to look toward the future in terms of what was most concerning people, and what needed to be done in relation to the recession and the reconceptualisation of poverty. Actively listening on the day and liaising effectively with the other groups in advance was imperative to the delivery of a plenary that was novel, absorbing, and pertinent, without digressing inappropriately or becoming overly repetitive. Literature outlining different ways to structure a plenary was only nominally useful as we wanted to implement a process which authentically embodied behavioural science praxis and empowered marginalised groups.

Drawing on notions of liberation as a collaborative process, we aimed to be multi-dimensional and multidisciplinary in our perspective, contributing to the exchange of ideas and experiences with conference attendees in a manner that provided opportunities for those whose experiences may have otherwise remained marginal or invisible to be heard. This was

reflected in our decision to bring together academic and lived experiences. We knew that conference attendees would be diverse, ranging from academic researchers and policy makers, to those working in service delivery and advocacy within the community sector, to second year behavioural science students, and we wanted the plenary to be meaningful and stimulating to those occupying these different contexts. We acknowledged that although inviting the sharing of lived experience is empowering, this does not necessarily critically engage with the issues, as lived experience can reflect dominant discourses through processes of internalised oppression (Freire, 1970, 1973). Thus, we decided to structure the plenary as a panel, with each of us taking on a different persona from which we would provide a future-oriented perspective to stimulate discussion. In choosing personas we wanted to draw on themes raised during the conference, but also speak to issues that may have received less attention, or were marginalised. We also attempted to choose personas that related to our degree majors, voluntary work we had undertaken, or roles at our internship agencies so that we could apply what we were learning. For example, it was important to have someone take on the role of a student living on a restricted income as many attendees would be experiencing this reality. Thus, one student took on the persona of an honours student who had returned to study earlier than planned after being retrenched from employment as part of widespread funding cuts to government. As an undergraduate the student lived on Youth Allowance and worked part-time, which furthered her insight into the realities of living on a low income with multiple responsibilities and roles.

Our group interactions reflected an egalitarian and organic structure. Initially we had no formally ascribed roles within our group. We had developed rapport and each of us respected each other so we largely left each person to make whatever contributions they felt they could, using Microsoft Word features such as track changes to collaborate in our preparation. I believed that a

more hierarchical group structure in the context of the ambiguity of our task would have led to social loafing as some people withdrew their contributions due to self-doubt, while others were overburdened with responsibilities (Latane, Williams & Harkins, 1979).

Halfway through semester, the Internship Co-ordinator scheduled meetings with each group to facilitate feedback on group processes and the proposals we had developed for our sessions. In retrospect, I can appreciate that the fact that we had to have this meeting, and that it was held in the Co-ordinator's office, meant that our group approached the meeting in a manner similar to a group of naughty school girls being sent to see the headmaster. Thus, when the Internship Co-ordinator said that it was advisable for us to have a project manager; someone other than the liaison, and we would not leave the room until we decided on someone, I felt trapped and antagonistic toward her. My inner cynic whispered that the participatory, empowering praxis of the course can sometimes obfuscate what remain essentially asymmetric power relations between educator and learner. In spite of everything, the Behavioural Science degree, Internship unit, and conference task operate within the confines of the dominant educational paradigm, with all of the unjust power relations that this encompasses. Even though the Internship Co-ordinator intended the meeting to facilitate student empowerment, self-determination, and power-sharing and collaboration with each other and with her, I reacted passively. I was colluding in my own oppression in this interaction because I did not communicate my perspective more openly with the Internship Co-ordinator. Thus, an opportunity for dialogue was forgone. Ironically, I have since come to understand how having a project manager, and developing more clarity about the tasks each person will be responsible for, can facilitate effective collaboration and need not imply a hierarchical dynamic.

The high level of self-determination and collaboration involved in the conference process was empowering even while it was sometimes confronting. On one hand it fostered self-efficacy, and I experienced a strong sense of community with the rest of the class, as it allowed us to realise and consolidate skills we had developed throughout our degree. However, our group sometimes felt isolated from other groups and encountered difficulty because information we needed from the other groups to plan the plenary was not always forthcoming. The slower flow of information was often due to factors beyond the other groups' control. They were also negotiating ambiguities about their roles and were still developing their sessions. In managing this isolation the mechanism of the liaison person was beneficial yet it did not always function optimally. Instead, each of us drew on informal networks of peers in other groups. This helped us feel more connected and develop a clearer picture of the orientation that the groups preceding us were taking so we could ensure that the plenary drew together themes and would complement the rest of the conference.

Another confronting issue arose from the differences in the way group members conceptualised their role. Some people took a broader view and worked to facilitate the success of the whole conference while others focused exclusively on their individual role. In contrast to the grading that is the norm in the rest of our degree, the Internship unit was to be awarded a non-graded pass. It is problematic for me to make attributions as to why some people took a more individualistic approach, as this could have been for a number of reasons. However, apathy, competitiveness, and discourses of 'doing as little as you can get away with' reflect the extrinsic learning motivation of maximum result with minimum effort which characterises the hidden curriculum of the dominant educational paradigm (Bergenhengouwen, 1987). Importantly, I have come to recognise the ways

in which I myself have internalised the dominant educational paradigm inadvertently. Moreover, I believe the non-graded pass was consistent with the heavy workload and praxis that the unit was embedded within. Thus, though I sometimes felt confronted by the individualistic approaches of some students, this served as a reminder of the importance of taking time to listen rather than working from assumptions, and of respecting the multiple perspectives which emerge from the diverse social realities people occupy.

Organising the conference while I simultaneously undertook a placement constituted experiential learning which helped prepare me for professional practice. For example, as part of our proposal we needed to develop a hypothetical budget that itemised our costs, and balanced within the amount the Internship Co-ordinator had allocated. If we exceeded this amount then we also needed to look at preparing a hypothetical grant application. Our group struggled to balance our budget. We managed it by not charging salaries for the full amount of time each member of our group spent preparing for the conference, arguing that as Behavioural Scientists we donated our time to the conference because it would raise community consciousness of the injustices surrounding poverty.

In the workplace it would be difficult to balance a budget by the idealistic means we devised. It is likely that we would be constrained by both our own need for income and by our employing organisation's unwillingness for us to spend time at work on a project that is outside the scope of our paid job (Drew, 2006). At the same time as I was confronted by this reality, I was experiencing the way that issues such as budgetary constraints can mediate a research approach through my placement. Although I was aware that research designs represent a compromise between what is optimal in terms of empowering communities and promoting social justice, and what is possible with the resources available, this had remained a distant, hypothetical consideration. These experiences became important in re-calibrating my

professional expectations by directing my attention towards research innovations that had been developed across a range of settings, including at my internship agency, to authentically support community capacity building and operate within time and budgetary constraints.

*The day of the conference*

On the day of the conference I was preoccupied with concerns that a chronic illness I have would impede my alertness and make it challenging to speak articulately. As part of the plenary I needed to participate in each session but at the same time observe; listening closely, making notes about what was discussed and taking account of feedback from those attending the conference. Our group was aware that it was important to project confidence and professionalism, although the structure of the plenary prevented rehearsal and required us to remain highly flexible.

Each session of the conference was insightful and rigorously argued. In my opinion everyone spoke with charisma, and responded to feedback from the audience in an articulate way that illustrated depth of critical knowledge of the implications of the discourse surrounding the recession and poverty, and ways to resist this oppression and support social justice. During morning tea people attending the conference commended me on its quality, and I could hear several similar comments being made to others. I hoped that our group would maintain this quality as I felt each of us represented the entire class due to the highly collaborative nature of the task.

Our panel moderator introduced the four of us who would speak on the plenary panel with some brief background about our personas and then segued into a short excerpt from a recently-aired *Four Corners* documentary about the new face of homelessness. The excerpt showed different Australian families talking directly to the camera about the difficulties they faced each day (ABC, 2009). We used this snapshot of people's lived experiences of the recession and

poverty as we felt it was a poignant demonstration of the relevance of key issues and arguments that had been discussed over the course of the conference, and provided a 'bridge' to link talking points we had developed with points that had been raised in earlier sessions. Moreover, the excerpt spoke to key concerns that each of us in our group honed in on because we had chosen personas that worked with or occupied marginalised positions even before the recession. Our collective message was the way that the inequalities and injustices associated with poverty will persist into the future – constituting intergenerational injustice, unless a more socially just system is implemented (Thompson, 2009). Although the new face of poverty brought about by the recession showed that poverty can affect anyone, and therefore in some ways expanded society's scope of justice to include some of those experiencing poverty, the new face often functions to make those who are already marginalised even more invisible.

It is difficult to evaluate the extent to which we achieved our aim of bringing multiple perspectives into the plenary and supporting a process where each person was encouraged to voice their perspective on the directions they would like to see taken. Since most of the conference attendees were students, the fact that the discussion progressed towards contemplation of issues raised by our group member who took on the persona of a student, regarding the way students living on a restricted income are positioned in dominant discourse as lazy, and told that they should get a 'real' job, suggests that in some respects we did promote opportunities for people to connect the research to their lived experiences critically. People questioned how this discourse positioned education as a privilege rather than a human right, and the way that all aspects of life have become commodified so that the social benefits that flow to the community from everyone having access to higher education are trivialised or dismissed. Ultimately, this led to a closing challenge from an attendee on the dual potential of education to foster inclusion and exclusion: To what extent does education still



have the potential to instil a more socially just and equitable society when the way that the education system is structured often upholds the status quo?

As the conference ended everyone in attendance seemed euphoric and filled with a sense of achievement. Our project manager emailed the plenary group to express how much she had enjoyed working with us and how proud she was of our shared achievement. The Dean of Arts and Sciences emailed all Arts and Sciences staff and students congratulating our class for the excellence and professionalism of the conference. Additionally, both our Internship Co-ordinator and the Head of Behavioural Science congratulated us in person, and then emailed us to reiterate their pride in our achievements throughout the process of the conference.

Despite the myriad congratulations I initially felt deflated as I perceived our group's 'performance' as deficient. After the conference I had the opportunity to attend what I thought of at the time as a 'real' academic conference. The term 'real' indicates the way I had positioned our conference as second-rate because we were undergraduate students, and therefore less knowledgeable than academics according to the dominant educational paradigm. I only truly believed how well executed and professional the efforts of our class were in conceptualising, developing, and delivering a conference through comparison. Ironically, engaging in comparison in this hierarchal manner reflects the competitive norms of the dominant paradigm of education.

#### **Conscientization and Praxis: Ongoing Processes**

Providing a definitive 'final' analysis of the transformative learning I experienced through the Internship unit and the conference would follow the academic convention of a conclusion. However, it would lack authenticity here because conscientization and praxis are ongoing processes (Freire, 1970, 1973). Consequently, throughout this paper I aimed to share how the collaborative, strengths-based, empowering process that the Internship unit and conference task were situated within continues to enrich my

critical awareness of the ways oppression is manifested within an education context. This growing awareness facilitates my understanding of how to engage in dialogical processes to develop socially-just alternatives which transform unjust power relations. The values-based praxis of the Behavioural Science course problematises the oppression inherent in the meritocratic assumptions, imposed outcomes, and competitive discourse that underpin the dominant educational paradigm. However, socialisation is affected by the dominant paradigm, and the Behavioural Science degree operates within the confines of the dominant educational paradigm it seeks to challenge. I cannot identify a solution for the tensions and marginalisation that this context inculcated throughout my experience of the conference. However, by critically reflecting on my experiences I hope to provide a resource for students and 'educators' to understand and advocate for pedagogies and praxis which support social justice. Power is omnipresent; yet by critically questioning power relations, and working together in ways that resist oppressive power relations, we have the potential to transform unjust power relations and develop alternatives which authentically embody the pursuit of social justice for all persons and peoples (Foucault, 1977; Freire, 1970, 1973).

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### Note

<sup>1</sup> Quotation marks are used to signify that the binary conceptualisation of educator/student is problematic from a Freirian perspective.

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