

# Students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical styles in Higher Education

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## Contextualisation

This paper examines students' perceptions of teaching in Higher Education from a sociological perspective.

**Abstract:** *My study aims to identify how students perceive the pedagogical styles of teachers in higher education. Drawing mainly on the works of Foucault, I examine the power relations exercised in the classroom which establish and control the interaction between teachers and students, the motivation of students and the empowering process of giving students correct and sufficient tools for developing a critical voice. The empirical data was gathered from semi-structured interviews with postgraduate and undergraduate students in higher education. My study concludes that the perceptions students have of their teachers' pedagogical styles can be empowering and/or disempowering depending on the intention underlying the teachers' choice of pedagogical styles. The powers exercised by teachers in the classroom can be perceived by students as providing them with critical understanding and voice, or restraining and limiting their critical understanding and voice, culminating in silence in the classroom.*

## Introduction

This study is about students' perceptions of their teachers' pedagogical styles in higher education. It looks at how students perceive the power relations between teachers and students as exercised through the pedagogical styles of teachers in higher education. It draws on theories of power relations. Foucault (1980) hypothesised that 'the prison was linked from the beginning to a project for the transformation of individuals' (ibid: p 39), arguing that the prison was supposed to transform individuals by 'acting with precision upon its individual subjects' (ibid: p 40), in the same way that schools and hospitals were meant to, and that '[t]he problem thereafter was not to teach the prisoners something, but rather to teach them nothing, so as to make sure that they could do nothing when they came out of prison' (ibid: p 42). This poses the question of whether it would be possible for the same situation to occur in higher education?

Foucault (1994: p 18) declared that he sees nothing wrong in itself for someone who knows more than another to tell, transmit, communicate and teach knowledge and skills to him/her. He then stated that the problem lies in practices of domination, which make students subject to the abusive authority of teachers. This association connected the issue of teachers having the power of teaching and training students and, at the same time, having the power of not teaching and training students. This raised a number of questions. Would it be possible for the authority of teachers to be exercised in the classroom in such a way that they would inhibit the teaching and training of students in higher education? Could teachers control what students learn and what they do not learn, how they learn and how they do not learn, how

much they learn and how much they do not learn, and, more important, who will learn and who will not learn?

Gore (1998: p 283) argued that teachers can exercise their power by 'controlling, regulating, invoking knowledge'. This control is exercised through deciding on the information to be given in the classroom through teaching, through supervision of the process of creation of knowledge and through assessment of the product of knowledge. If we agree that the main purpose of education is to develop students as independent thinkers, equipped to make decisions and to solve problems, can teachers, particularly in higher education, be susceptible to a power-control-urge over their students' process of knowledge production? I set out to investigate this possibility by exploring the perceptions which students have of this contradiction between the purpose of higher education and the control over the knowledge production process. The aims of this study are to develop a better understanding of power relations at the micro-level of pedagogy in higher education and to examine students' perceptions of different pedagogical styles.

I begin by discussing my methodology (semi-structured interviews with students) and the theories underlying power relations. The interviews are interpreted in relation to the theories with particular attention being paid to lecturing styles and the various ways in which students' silence can be interpreted.

## **Methodology**

For my study, I carried out 10 semi-structured interviews as the principal means of data collection. The students that I interviewed could develop their own discourse and describe their own experience according to their understanding of my questions, while I could explore their perceptions of teachers' pedagogical styles. Each interview lasted about an hour. My sample consisted of students in higher education, including undergraduate and postgraduate students. Individual interviews were carried out at the Media Service of the Institute of Education, and in the Catholic Chaplaincy of the University of London at Newman House.

The interviews were originally conducted in March 2000 for my MA dissertation and have been analysed a second time for this study. The interviewees represented a random sample of students from different courses, Masters degrees and undergraduate courses, in both the social sciences and the sciences. The wide variety of students' backgrounds offered a broader view of the students' perceptions of the teachers' pedagogical styles. Semi-structured interviews, which Mason (1998: p 38) regards as 'qualitative interviewing', were used to allow students to probe their answers, to give examples, and express their feelings verbally and non-verbally. According to Mason, qualitative interviewing is relatively informal, appearing to be more a conversation and discussion than questions and answers. Its approach to the topics and issues is thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative, generating data from the social interaction between the interviewees and the interviewer. This flexibility facilitates the interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and the probing of the questions and answers.

## **Theories of power relations**

This study examines the theories of power relations manifested in teacher-student relationships at the micro-level of education in the classroom. These power relations are exercised through the pedagogical styles of teachers.

## Concepts of power

Power is a very controversial concept because of its omnipresence, its changeability, its reversibility, and its instability. Despite this variety of mutative characteristics, power does not exist on its own. It is not a self-contained and self-sufficient entity. Power, to exist, needs to be exercised in dynamic ways, such that the boundaries between the powerful and powerless are not entirely explicitly delineated, but subtly manifested in sophisticated ways. The dynamics of power allow it to move from A to B and from B to A, while both are interacting with one another. Without this interaction, power would not exist. In the operation of power both sides should exercise a certain form of free choice: comply with it or resist it. Foucault (1994: p 12) says that relations of power are 'changeable, reversible and unstable' and 'there must be on both sides at least a certain form of liberty'. These dynamic characteristics make power an utterly, irresistibly fascinating and attractive exercise that we, as human beings, unconsciously or consciously exercise in our encounters, and this is true of the teacher-student relationship in the classroom.

The dynamics of power consist in that dimension of a relationship whereby A is trying to impose on B beliefs, knowledge, truths, interests and desires, or specific behaviours that A necessarily wants B to adopt or to change, in a manner contrary to B's own interest. However, the possibility of B resisting A's power still exists. Should B resist the power A holds over her/him, B would revert, destabilise and change the power relation to her/his advantage. Lukes (1978: p 34) emphasises the imposing characteristic of power, when he defines his concept of power by saying that: A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests. And Foucault (1994: p 11) emphasises the relationship between power and the desire to control another's behaviour by saying that:

*'in human relations, whatever they are - whether it be a question of communicating verbally..., or a question of a love relationship, an institutional or economic relationship - power is always present: it means the relationships in which one wishes to direct the behaviour of another.'*

Some educators would find imposition a strong word to be used in relation to the teacher-student relationship in the classroom. Imposition implies control, and control is the teacher's middle-name. I am not contesting the existence of control in the classroom. A degree of teacher control should and must exist in the classroom, because up to a certain point, the curriculum agenda should and must be pursued.

Power, to exist, needs freedom. Freedom is an important component of power. Without the freedom to choose between complying with the power, or resisting the power exercised over one's self, power would not exist. According to Foucault (1994), relations of power are everywhere because freedom is everywhere. I cannot conceive of any human interaction or relationship in which the exercise of power would not be present. In other words, to socialise, human beings need to relate to one another. Foucault (1982: p 224) considered a society without power relations an abstraction, for 'power relations are rooted in the system of social networks'. Possibility or future potential forms the basis of the power dynamics: the possibility to change itself, revert poles, adapt to the momentum, disguise itself, and, above all, the possibility to be resisted.

Foucault (1980: p 51) connected power and knowledge. The connection between power and knowledge can be a vicious circle: the more power, the more knowledge; the more knowledge, the more power. As power recreates itself, knowledge of this power has also to evolve to make resistance possible. Mayo (1998: p 116) drew attention to the fact that '[t]he more power infuses everything, the deeper the knowledge of the subject about itself becomes'. His argument establishes the cycle that power and knowledge go through constant change. It is a 'web-like system' that transcends expectation (Tanabe, 1999: p 147).

Being concerned with this going beyond of power mechanisms, moving from concrete to abstract, from intellect to emotion, Foucault conceptualised power as a web system which extends the relations of power to the 'discursive, practical, material, intellectual, and psychological' (Burbules, 1986: p 104). Foucault (1980: p 39) is concerned with the capillary mechanisms of power. According to him, this form of power touches peoples' bodies, inserts itself into their actions, attitudes, their learning processes and their everyday lives. Tanabe (1999: p 147) expanded this concern by adding that 'relationships of power are shaped by the broader social context in which they exist'. The understanding of this capillary form of power is essential to the understanding of the relationship between teachers and students during the learning process, and in particular to the understanding of how students perceive teachers' pedagogical styles.

## **Power relations theories**

The power relation between two parties is a relationship where their activities are restrained (dynamically) and restricted between the two parties. Because of these dynamic activities, their individual interests, strategies, and agendas are constantly reshaping themselves according to the mutative power characteristics of one part to the other. This endless battle for control over one party by another, originating in a conflict of interests, causes the pendulum of power to oscillate freely between both parties. The parties can be individuals, groups or sub-groups that comply or resist one another. Burbules (1986: p 103), drawing on work by Giddens (1979) and Poulantzas (1978), defines conceptions of power relations as 'a relation of power [that] binds and constrains the activities of both parties, and each party defines its purposes and range of alternatives partly in terms of the other<sup>1</sup>. He also says that '[i]n the power relation itself each party might gain a particular gratification from the negotiated balance between compliance and resistance' (ibid: p 103). The categories of power are presented and defined in Table 1.

<b>Consent</b>	requires previous approval and responsibility for the decision from the party which is consenting. Consent is not based on conflict of interests. The parts involved in the consent both recognise the common purpose to which they ascribe.
<b>Domination</b>	involves physical and/or psychological strategies which do not allow the possibility of resistance. Domination involves total control, absolute ruling, and final incontestable command. Domination destroys social human relations, and can involve the use of physical and/or psychological force. Freedom, as mentioned earlier on, is the essential part and basis for the exercise of power. Burbules (1986: p 100) argues that domination is based on 'incompatibility of interests', and that domination can involve 'physical or psychological strategies' such as 'threat and brainwashing'.
<b>Resistance</b>	is considered by Burbules (1986) as a grey area of power relations, because it involves negotiation. When compliance is a result of an agreement, it is close to consent. And when compliance is a result of an explicit or implicit threat, it is close to domination.
<b>Compliance</b>	is the more dynamic category of power relations. Resistance always implies a changing of strategies on the part of the one who is exercising power, as well as on the part of the one over whom power is being exercised. That is why resistance by the individual subjected to power makes power so seductive, enchanting and exciting to the subject of power. The more resistance to power, the more gratifying and inebriating the power exercise will be.

**Table 1.** Categories of Power

I see consent as the idealised democratic relationship between human beings, provided it is reached by all parties on equal terms. Like Foucault (1982) and Burbules (1986), I dismiss the idea of consent and domination as power relations, because they are extremes and do not offer scope for compliance and/or resistance. I also consider compliance to be a grey area of power relations, because it involves bargaining/negotiation. When compliance is a result of an agreement, it is close to consent. And when compliance is a result of an explicit or implicit threat, it is close to domination. Resistance, the more dynamic category of power relations, is characterised by the constant creation and re-creation of strategies on the part of the one who is exercising power, as well as on the part of the one over whom power is being exercised.

Power relations are associated with control, direction, prevention and domination, as well as with production and creation. The tools/mechanisms through which teachers exercise power in higher education are presented and defined in Table 2.

<b>Authority</b>	Teachers' authority is maintained by social and institutionalised mechanisms that allow teachers to exercise their power based on status quo and on their specialist knowledge or expertise. This tool/mechanism is also responsible for maintaining teachers' privileges, custom and tradition. By maintaining teachers' privileges, their authority is also maintained, and remains unexamined, in the sense that one never challenges a teacher's expertise or specialist knowledge.
<b>Influence/ manipulation</b>	Teachers can make suggestions, give advice, persuade and convince students to make some decision, to take some action, to join a group or to support a decision. This tool/ mechanism can also be exercised indirectly by an authority, when the teacher who has authority is using her/his expertise or specialist knowledge to persuade the student to make a decision that will directly or indirectly benefit the teacher who is exercising influence/manipulation. It consists of the provision and transfer of information from one person to another. Transmission and provision of information is the work of the teacher in higher education.
<b>Bargaining/ negotiation</b>	Teachers negotiate with students, in order to get students to do what they, the teachers, want them to do. In this negotiation, a teacher will offer individual students some privileges that the student was seeking and interested in, and those privileges, when given to a student, will not jeopardise a teacher's position and interests. The problem with bargaining is that conflict can be resolved only for a certain period, until a student understands that every time a student offers resistance to the teacher's interests, a student will get something she/he wants and is interested in. It is most frequently exercised as a disciplinary tool, where the teacher controls the student's behaviour, attitudes and engagement in the classroom, but also it is exercised when teachers and students negotiate work to be done in the classroom
<b>Surveillance/ supervision</b>	Teachers exercise a constant close control by observing, supervising and monitoring carefully an individual's attitudes, behaviour, movements, actions, activities, skills, knowledge, performance, product, engagement and learning, with the intention to increase production, engagement and learning in a shorter period of time. This constant observation, registration and reporting are carried out in a subtle way, and the teacher who is observing, registering and reporting can intervene or not with the student who is being observed, registered and reported. It can be done through coaching of students' work. Through one-to-one tutorial (scrutiny of students' learning, knowledge, production of knowledge and learning needs). Through observation of students' engagement, participation and interest in the classroom and in the subject. And mainly through examination/assessment of the students' product (learning).

Table 2 cont/ ..

<b>Coercion</b>	Teachers are capable of punishing or threatening to punish students, with the intention of having a student comply with the teacher's interests. Through coercion a teacher finds his/her way to control the psyche (mind) and/or the physical (body) of a student. Coercion, in the past, was the principal tool of teaching, i.e. coercion was the main pedagogical style for teaching students. Today, teachers are no longer allowed to relieve their frustrations on students through physical punishment or even the threat of it. However, punishment and threat of punishment are still present in education and thriving because the dynamics of power, through coercion, has evolved and recreated itself to fulfil the demands of new powers in the education system: teachers' control over the grading and the establishment of deadlines for handing in students' work or drafts; and teachers' control of students' entire future.
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**Table 2.** The tools/mechanisms of power in education

Teachers' authority passes unexamined and unquestioned by the majority of students in the classroom, where a fear of challenging the teacher's expertise or specialist knowledge suppresses any instinct to challenge. This power appears unproblematic and indiscernible, and seems largely to be taken for granted. The majority of teachers consider knowledge as property, because the ownership of knowledge gives and maintains for teachers their comfortable position of power.

Teachers' influence/manipulation persuades students to comply with the teacher's agenda or interests. Teachers are the ones that will directly or indirectly benefit from students' decisions. Teachers use their authority to influence and manipulate students' decisions, but teachers' coercive power can also influence and manipulate students' decisions. The grading power - coercive power - of teachers can influence students to go for the right answers to achieve learning or to comply with teachers' agendas.

Teachers' bargaining/negotiation is mostly exercised through the teachers' desire to control students' behaviour, attitudes and engagement in the classroom. To a lesser degree, bargaining/negotiation can be manifested in teachers and students negotiating work to be done, dates for handing in work, and to a limited extent, the pedagogical activity to be carried out in the classroom, in so far as it does not jeopardise teachers' power in the classroom. Teachers fulfil some of students' requests, in order to pursue their larger agenda.

Teachers' surveillance/supervision, this grey area in teachers' pedagogical styles, is commonly exercised by teachers to keep students under close control. Through it, teachers will observe, supervise and monitor students' skills, knowledge, performance, product, engagement, learning and learning needs in the classroom and/or in tutorials. It can be manifested through the list of recommended readings for their session, mainly when the texts, articles or books are highlighted by the teachers. It can also be manifested through invitations to students to comment on some issues presented in the recommended readings.

Teachers' coercion, as mentioned before, is also commonly exercised by teachers in the classroom when teachers punish or threaten to punish, physically or psychologically, with the intention of making students comply with their interests. Coercion in the classroom can be manifested at two levels. First, at the psychological level, which I consider to be the informal exercise of coercion as a threat of punishment. Second, at the physical level, which I consider to be the formal exercise of coercion. The threat of punishment, which is the psychological level of teachers' coercion, can be manifested through teachers pressuring students to complete a task. Coercion can be exercised through teachers' advice to students on how to produce work and also through telling students what is acceptable and what is not when doing their work.

Power relations are not only a means of control and direction, they are also a means of prevention. Power is not only exercised when there is a conflict in process. Power is also exercised when conflict is not allowed to occur in the first place. The simple fact of not allowing one's view, ideas, arguments or beliefs to be known is an exercise of power. Power relations involve decision-making and non-decision-making. Lukes (1978: p 18-19), drawing on the decision-making and non-decision-making analysis of Bacharach and Baratz (1970), says that non-decision-making is a means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits and privileges in the community can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena; or failing all these things maimed or destroyed.

The silencing that the non-decision-making can create in some parts of society is reinforced by social-political and economic inequities that permeate society's structure.

## **Students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical styles**

The teaching and learning processes are diverse and complicated, which means that there is always some firm ground on which to settle, because of the diversity of students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical styles in the classroom. In a group, with 20 students or more, it is not possible to take the varied individual needs of all students into account. What works for some of the students clearly does not work well for others. Some like to learn through engagement with the teacher and with other students. Others prefer to learn by listening, by just being there. Critical pedagogies concerned with empowerment in the classroom also express dual meaning for empowerment and voice.

The first meaning of empowerment and voice is that in which the teachers open their classroom as a "social laundry", where issues of race, sexuality, religion, culture, gender, etc. would be exposed. The classroom, then, would become this 'healing place', as Hooks (1994: p 61) named it, or 'healing space', as Walsh (1996: p 202) named it, to solve these issues therapeutically by confrontation. Giroux (1992), drew on Hooks' (1989) work, to support this opened space. He pointed out that, according to Hooks, '[a]wareness of the need to speak, to give voice to the varied dimensions of our lives, is one way [to begin] the process of education for critical consciousness (pp 169-170)'. He then went on to explain that critical pedagogy serves to make visible those marginal cultures that have traditionally been suppressed.

The second meaning of empowerment and voice is that in which students acquire the tools of critical understanding and critical reasoning. These tools will give them access to a better understanding of themselves in the world, and a better understanding of the world in themselves. Empowerment and voice provide students with the tools of written and oral discourse, as well as awareness of self and the other. To be aware of the other includes being aware of all cultural, social, political, physical and psychological issues that the other, as the self, presents and represents in itself. The second meaning is the one I will use in the interpretation of my data. That does not mean that I do not recognise and accept the huge impact of social and cultural differences in the classroom.

## Lecturing in the classroom

My study revealed that students like to learn in a lecturing environment where they can receive input from the teacher. Seven out of the ten students I interviewed felt positive about lectures. Input has to be given through interaction between the teacher and the students. Here the teachers have authority in their subjects, and the teachers are also enthusiastic, passionate, confident, interested, stimulating, and energetic about their own subjects. The students are allowed to ask questions during the lecture, and they receive answers from their teachers. After the input is presented, students want to break into small groups to discuss and debate the input with their peers and teachers. This variety of teaching methods, according to the interviewed students, makes them feel comfortable, confident, stimulated, encouraged, motivated and happy. It also gives the students a sense of achievement. A theology student mentioned that he feels more empowered when the lecture is not dominated by the teacher:

*7 mean... probably ... one of the best times when you feel most empowered is in... precisely in small classes. When it's not... dominated by the teachers .... Where he doesnt mind being interrupted, I think that's good. ... Some of my lecturers hate being interrupted. I feel that he is talking at the class, rather than with the class. It seems that you dont need to be there. He is doing it for his own benefit or something. He's got his lecture, he wants to deliver it. That's that. .... In not allowing you to ask questions, and in not answering a question, they are merely defending themselves. I feel patronised.'*

He added that teachers who do not allow students to ask questions, and do not answer students' questions, are merely trying to avoid confrontation. This "defending themselves" is a very serious issue. What makes teachers defend themselves? Part of the answer to this question is given by Shor (1992: p 102), who mentions that '[s]ome teachers lack the experience, maturity, or support to allow their students freedom<sup>1</sup>. The other part of the answer is what I call demode expertise, where the teachers have been doing the same thing for so long that they do not even bother re-evaluating their authority (expertise) and pedagogical tools for delivering their knowledge, experience and expertise in their area. An information management student, in the following example, touched this delicate issue of old expertise.

She likes to learn in a lecture situation where she does not feel intimidated by the teacher, or by the students, and where the teacher is imparting recently acquired knowledge, reading, and new ideas on the topic:

*Through lecture situation. Small group lectures, ... I feel more comfortable. .... I also like to be introduced to new bodies of knowledge from somebody who's experienced in that field of research. .... If that person's got expert knowledge in the field or special knowledge in the field. And they impart their recent research, or they impart the body of knowledge they've been studying for a number of years..... I dont like when the lecture had not really added new ideas to the topic. Some lecturers at university, who have been teaching the same modules for more than 20 years, they are using old notes, old module study guides. They're just simply rehashing things they had prepared many, many years ago.'*

This demode expertise, this stagnant knowledge, does not pass unnoticed by students. It can cause resistance in the classroom. The students know when they are being given, in an authoritarian manner, knowledge that the teacher did not bother to update.

A psychology student said that she likes it when teachers are prepared to listen to what she has to say, and not just follow their own agenda:



*'In a more interactive way. ....Someone who is prepared to listen to what students have to say. And not just go along with their own agenda. So, take into account what the student wants to get out of it. .... Just someone who could be prepared to answer my questions and stuff. Instead of: oh... shut up. I am going to tell you this. This is what I am going to tell you, and this is what you are going to learn'*

This example illustrates how teachers make sure that their "safe space" is secure, and that their authority is not to be tested. Shor (1992: p 102) mentioned that lecturing is a safer and more reassuring way to teach because the teacher's position keeps students at a distance. Boler (1999: p 139) added that '[t]o preserve authority, educators maintain immeasurable isolation and distance from students'. This distance, mentioned by Shor and Boler, maintains the teacher's authority and coercive power in the classroom.

An MA student in higher and professional education likes a lecture situation where the teacher is varying his/her teaching style, and favours a situation where she can get her hands on the work:

*7 quite like information given. I quite like a lecture, mostly if the lecturer's style is interesting, entertaining... They're talking about something they know about. So, they've got lots of references. They know the background reading. They know the area. They are confident about it..... I dont like lots and lots of lecturing that's the whole session, sort of, the three hours somebody talking..... It is nice, if there is some bit where you do it with the whole group. .... I dont mind if somebody does know a lot of things and happens to tell you. .... When someone gets hands on something... And I like. ...I like actually doing an activity.'*

She likes to become what Cummins (1986: p 27) called an 'active generator of [her] knowledge'. She feels that the production of knowledge should occur during the interaction between the teachers and the students, and also during the interaction between the students and other students.

An MA student in philosophy mentioned that he does not like lectures very much. He prefers seminars where discussion is possible and questions are posed and answered. He emphasised that this pedagogical style makes his heart pound with excitement:

*Well, I like seminars and I like discussion classes. .... I think it's very exciting. I actually... if it is a seminar class, I find it very, very intense. My heart is pounding sometimes. I find it very pleasant..... I dont really like lectures very much. Big lectures, where you dont get the chance to ask any questions.... I had to give a seminar early this year. ....It made me feel confident. Made me feel empowered, definitely. Definitely did. I mean... It made me feel more confident to speak and challenge other people's views.'*

He mentioned that he feels empowered when he feels confident enough to challenge other people's views. In a situation where the students have to present their own seminars, teachers have a better vision of students' knowledge. The teachers' surveillance is facilitated by putting the students on the spot, because, by participating, students are letting the teachers know how much understanding and knowledge they have. Shor (1992: p 21) mentioned that through lively participation students can experience meaningful work and teachers can better understand the cognitive level of students.

Another MA student in education mentioned that he likes to learn in an environment where the teacher lectures with vigour, and where he also has the option to ask questions. Basically, he prefers to sit back listening to the teacher:

*'Basically lecturing. Less work in groups and more lectures. A very energetic lecture. A lecturer that catches my imagination, with lots of examples and a bit of humour as well. The use of humour is very important to bring empathy to the class. Where the lecturers are highly intelligent. Basically someone speaking in front of me, with the option of discussion during the lecture. I like to make questions during information given. If I don't understand anything when they are teaching.'*

He, by expressing his dislike of group work, makes it clear that teachers' pedagogical styles which involve students as co-producers of their own knowledge can cause oppression as well as liberation. Shor (1992: p 24) recognised that participatory learning activities in class can provoke anxiety and defensiveness in some students. Boler (1999: p 183) argued further that 'any pedagogy or curricula potentially evokes resistance, fear, and anger<sup>1</sup>. What liberates some students, oppresses others. The bargaining power of teachers is constantly used in group work. The teachers implicitly negotiate the sharing of authority with the students, in return for student engagement.

An MSc student in chemistry mentioned that he likes lectures given by an entertaining teacher who can present the subject clearly: a teacher who is approachable and welcomes his questions and answers them; a teacher who uses a variety of teaching and learning resources; a teacher who can guide him through a problem-solving process; a teacher who does not have a monotonous voice:

*'I like lectures, when you have a problem, you can ask your lecturer what you have to do to solve the problem. It makes me feel confident. .... Someone that is very jovial. A lecturer that can present very clearly. A lecturer that makes it easier to understand the subject. Of course we have to accept that not everyone can do that. A lecturer that gives handouts, explains clearly, is approachable, welcomes your questions and answers them. A lecturer that uses overheads and makes sure that the O. H. Ts are clearly understandable. A lecturer that doesn't speak in one tone and make you sleepy. I don't like to be taught in a way that they tell you this is this and that is that. I prefer when they give you basic concepts and then you can apply them. It is not good when they give you many things.'*

A BA student in mathematics and education mentioned that he learns better when he can apply what he learned:

*'Probably in a more informal situation, experiencing things. A more hands on experience is ideal, because that way you understand better... makes me feel more confident, when I have to use it again in application..... I feel happier when I feel that I can apply my previous experiences in that new situation. .... I don't like learning basically by someone standing in front of the room and lecturing most of the time. It just goes straight over the top of my head, rather than into the head. I like someone who uses various different resources, videos, handouts, articles and journals. When the teacher is very passionate about his subject and manages to motivate me a lot. I felt empowered to go and to find out more about the subject.'*

He expressed his feeling of being powerless when he is bored with teachers' pedagogical styles. He makes a clear association between engagement and empowerment. When teachers are reinforcing students' passivity in the classroom, the students feel disempowered, whereas when teachers are encouraging students' participation in the classroom, some students feel empowered. Others may feel patronised by teachers' pedagogical style.

## Silence in the classroom

Listening and silence are intrinsically interwoven, therefore they produce different readings of students' silence in the classroom. As education and knowledge are not value free, Boler (1999) considers that silence and omission are not value free as well. The first reading is that silent listening does not mean that students are not engaged in an intellectual manner with the teacher and the subject, because some students like to listen to other people's ideas and opinions in order to build their own. In this sense, listening is what Maher (1985: p 44) considers as the 'way, [the students] may replace their own search for the "right answers" with a critical understanding and evaluation of their own and other's perspectives', and what Morley (1999: p 124) considers as 'a time for reflection and processing'. In other words, listening empowers students with the tools to formulate and express their voice, as it is the case of the following two participants. An MA student in adult and continuing education mentioned that she likes listening to other people's opinions in order to build her own opinion:

*I like very much listening other people's opinions. First of all, I am a keen listener. I am not sure that I am going to say anything, but I am very interested in other people's opinions and views in order to build mine.'*

The MA student in philosophy, mentioned before, stated that he likes listening to the problems that other people have in understanding the subject, because there are often things that affect him, which he might have not considered until then:

*I am interested in seeing what other people's problems are, because often there are things that happen to you. Which you might not have considered until then. And then, by hearing the teacher's answers to their problems, you have [the ability] to understand the subject.'*

In this reading of silence in the classroom, one can observe that teachers' authority power is being exercised when students are listening to teachers imparting their knowledge. Teachers' authority is working in this learning environment, because between teachers and students there is a sort of consensus going on.

The second reading is that being silent can mean that the students are used to being silenced throughout their lives. Some students are not used to expressing their opinions, points of view, critical analysis and even concerns. Giroux (1992: p 158) observed that '[he] find[s] too many students who come from places where they're afraid to speak. They've been silenced all their lives'. Teachers need to stop inhibiting students' voices, a practice which Shor (1992: p 98) considered to be 'an embarrassingly old outcome of teacher-talk [pedagogical style]'. In this reading of silence in the classroom, one can observe that the teacher's coercion and domination powers are being exercised when students are silent for fear of physical and/or psychological punishment. Lewis (1993: p 13) expressed her concern with 'the experience of silence: Being silenced/choosing silence', interpreting it as consent to and absence from the 'male privilege to name the world' (ibid.: p 31).

The third reading is that being silent can mean that the dynamics of power relations are being exercised by the students in resistance to the teacher's power. In other words, the students' silence is resistance to the teacher's authority or coercive powers in the classroom. Morley (1999: p 124) argued that silence and inertia in groups can often be the result of 'unprocessed conflict, anger, resistance and hurt'. The group goes dead as it can feel powerless or insecure to resolve differences. Some students can feel powerless and insecure when confronted with the teacher's coercive power. Students feel humiliated, excluded, angry and hurt. They feel that their views and opinions do not count and do not have value. And sometimes this can be a case of pure discrimination.

The MA student in information management mentioned before, presents a very interesting example of being overpowered by teachers in the classroom. She associates her silence with her resistance to being overpowered by her teacher in the classroom:

*'One situation .... We've been given a scenario to look at, and comment on the statistical approach that had been used by a particular researcher. And I had noticed some inconsistency in the way that those statistics have been presented, and I made a comment. Because the work was the lecturer's own work, that was a difficult situation. Because you are making criticism of the lecturer. The quality of his research method. He let it go for while. Then, he took some other views. And then, I had another point to make. And then, he turned to me and said: you talk too much. I don't want to hear your views..... So, that made me feel quite disempowered. And from that moment on, in the course of the seminar, I didn't make any further contribution. It affected my motivation. I was completely turned off of the subject. I was completely excluded from contributing any further in the session. I felt very angry.'*

During the interview, I suggested to her that discrimination on basis of gender and race might be the reason for her teacher telling her to shut up. She utterly denied and refused to accept discrimination on the grounds of gender and race in her university. However, the individual perception of power is crucial for the reading, interpretation, understanding, assessment and judgement of the power relations. If the power relation is not perceived by the individual, then there is no power relation. This lack of perception of the power relation may be the cause of her denial and refusal of being discriminated on grounds of gender and race. Her attitude towards my suggestion can also be read as "internalised oppression" (Morley, 1999: p 113) and/or internalised domination, that is when an individual, as a result of racism, sexism, classism, etc., internalises and introjects the negative associations which his/her oppressor projects onto him/her.

In this reading of silence in the classroom, one can observe that a teacher's coercion and domination powers are being exercised when students are silenced by their teachers during the imparting of the teachers' knowledge. One can also observe that the teachers establish their authority by completely cutting out the students' engagement and interaction with them. Their surveillance was able to provide them with a picture of possible challenges and risks to their authority.

The fourth reading is that being silent can mean that the students are tired, particularly if they are part-time students attending an evening course. Morley (1999:124) argued that '[i]n the case of part-time students, it can also be linked to fatigue', and fatigue is a reality in mass higher education system. In this reading of silence in the classroom, one can observe that the teacher's authority can be exercised and can also be shared when students are listening to the teacher to impart his/her knowledge. One way or another, the students have their particular reasons which go beyond any attempt on the part of the teacher to captivate students' interests and attention. But exceptions can be found in this reading, and then, when exceptions are found, it is down to teachers' pedagogical styles to bolster students' interests, attention and motivation in the classroom.

The fifth reading is that being silent can mean that students are being silenced and sedated by the teachers' pedagogical styles. The teachers are presenting their subject in such a way that students' learning needs are not taken into account. Shor (1992: p 83) recognised that there is a problem in higher education on how to present academic knowledge. He argued that '[t]he problem is how to present academic knowledge so that it does not silence students or sedate them'. The MA student in higher and professional education mentioned before, stated that she does not like the silence which is caused by the boring pedagogical style of some teachers, and also by the strong views that some teachers hold on their subjects which do not validate students' viewpoints:

*I dont know... I don't like lots and lots of lecturing that's the whole session, ...when you feel they are trying to impress you that they always know things. .... You cant say valid things or whatever. I dont like that very much.... I think it is quite frustrating. .... You cant draw them out. Draw them into a debate or discussion. And they stay only looking at it from one point of view. .... Sometimes, I used to have this feeling like I have to reassure the lecturers that what they say is very interesting, even though it isnt..... So, I dont like that silence. .... It is a sort of sorry for the lecturer. Sorry for them that the session didnt go very well.'*

Teachers' understanding of students' learning is the key to solving this reading of silence in the classroom. Ellsworth (1989: p 306) explained that by understanding students' learning, teachers can devise more effective strategies for bringing the students up to the teachers' level of understanding. Knowing the level of the students, and adapting to it, are concerns expressed by the students in this study. Failure to understand the level at which the students are can cause confusion, can prevent students from learning, and can also demotivate, disengage and discourage student learning.

The theology student, mentioned before, believes that the teacher should take into account the level at which the students are. He mentioned that the teacher should be able to make his/her subject accessible and understandable to students, but he/she does not need to break it down:

*I think somebody who is prepared to... adapt to the level he's talking. ....A good teacher is someone who can make it... accessible to that level. Break it down into very simple explanation to the people. He doesn't need to break it down quite so much in the classes.... Someone who works with us... but at the same time, he doesn't expect you to follow him... he doesn't talk at the level which you don't understand.'*

In this reading of silence in the classroom, one can observe that the teachers' authority is being strongly exercised, when students are listening to the teachers imparting their knowledge. These teachers take for granted that students are really understanding what the teachers are teaching. I argue that taking students for granted must not be an acceptable practice in higher education, if higher education is to empower students with academic knowledge.

## Conclusion

This study has explored power relations in the classroom to help teachers understand how students perceive teachers' pedagogical styles. The main finding is that teachers' pedagogical styles can positively and negatively affect the relationship between teachers and students in the classroom. It reveals that when students perceive teachers' pedagogical styles as authoritarian and coercive, students' motivation, interest and engagement are likely to reduce and/or disappear. It also reveals that, when teachers are exercising their surveillance over students' learning processes positively, students feel that they are being supported and that teachers have an interest in them. When surveillance is exercised negatively, students feel invaded and deceived by teachers, resulting in annoyance and resentment with teachers' pedagogical styles.

I have come to the conclusion that the authority and influence of teachers, when associated with their surveillance and bargaining, can be perceived by the students as something positive. This is particularly so if the intention behind the teachers' pedagogical styles is to engage students in the production of knowledge, motivate students to produce knowledge, and empower students to go beyond the acquired knowledge produced. I have also concluded that the authority and influential power of teachers, when associated with their

coercive power, can be perceived by the students as something negative. This is particularly so if the intentions are to control students participation and engagement in the production of knowledge, or to silence and dominate students' critical voice and opinion.

The students and teachers engaged in power relations perceive these relations on an individual level. Students are individuals and not a group. I therefore recognise the difficulty of addressing each and every student's individual need in the classroom in a mass higher education system. This difficulty escalates in a system where the number of students and the targets established by quality assurance organisations eliminate the space for dialogue and negotiation, replacing it with prescriptive authoritarian guidance for teaching.

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