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Interrogating Critical Pedagogy-Social Text Editorial Board Exercise

My artifact is a window into thinking about infusing critical pedagogy within graduate coursework in the professionalization of STS scholars. Much of our attention in critical pedagogy focuses on undergrad students (often STEM students), which we as graduate students learned via TAing or teaching ourselves. Within the context of graduate seminars, the typical read and discuss model prevails. How can we apply critical pedagogy within the context of those traditional spaces, which often valorize “old-school” approaches to knowledge? How do we do so not only to folks like those participating in this workshop, who are predisposed to pedagogical innovation?

My colleague Sonja Schmid and I have co-taught our department’s Introduction to STS course over the past three years. The course performs the following functions:

- Introduces students to the field and its origins
- Develops a repertoire of approaches to understanding STS
- Practices forms of STS scholarship
- Connects students from our two campuses (Blacksburg: traditional PhD students; Northern Virginia: working professionals seeking a PhD) often with different demographics, identities, and career goals

We have experimented with ways of breaking down the “accept this received wisdom,” do so as individual students, think about knowledge in transit vs the progression of ideas.

I personally also wanted students to reflect on and perhaps challenge the performative activism of STS, and how we are on the better side of history with respect to the positivistic bad guys we are debunking (obviously using hyperbole). A key origin story and myth here is about the Science Wars, which had a profound place in the canon, and which has been rekindled in the post-truth debates of the past five years. Students are genuinely conflicted with these issues. The Sokal hoax was at the center of that, and plays into the us/them good guys/bad guys dichotomy. Students don’t know anything about this, typically, until they learn the lore. And when we tell them, we almost never assign Sokal itself. For this exercise then, we assign the paper along with other readings on post-truth:

Week 10. October 29. Post-Truth?

[Sokal, Alan. 1996.](#) “Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity” *Social Text* 46/47, Vol. 14, Nos. 1 & 2, pp 217–252.

[Shapin, Steven. 2001.](#) “How to be Antiscientific.” In *The One Culture* edited by Jay A. Labinger and Harry Collins, 99-115. The University of Chicago Press.

[Latour, Bruno. 2004.](#) “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern.” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2: 225-248.

Fuller, Steve. 2018. *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game*. London: Anthem, selections.

We don't tell them that it's a hoax paper up front. Instead, we have them role-play themselves as an editorial board--as much for the specific context as for introducing them to how knowledge gets certified, produced, etc. and what it is like to evaluate others' work in a professional context. They work together on this. We then ask them to embody individually the perspective of other scholars to write individual reviews of the paper.

We additionally place ourselves in the exercise as part of the editorial board, so that we are part of the game rather than evaluators from afar. This is time consuming, but it dramatically enhances the engagement and participation of students.

The results are often unexpected. The first time we did this as an asynchronous, out of class activity, each of the three groups naturally came to: reject, revise and resubmit, and accept. Which demonstrates the fickle nature of academic review.

There are many more dimensions about situatedness, the value of scientific training in STS, subtle encouragement of pedagogical innovation, collaboration, and tension, but this is likely more than enough detail for now.