Chapter 4
Leadership Development in the UAE: Critical Perspectives on Intercultural Pedagogies in a Graduate Education Programme

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Abstract Perspectives on the interaction between people of different cultures has changed considerably over recent decades alongside significant changes in higher education worldwide as the policies of globalisation and internationalisation have become widespread and neoliberalism has become prevalent in higher education, characterised by economic imperatives and a trend towards standardised curricula and pedagogy. Responding to the call of Mullen et al. (Interchange 43:181–186, 2013) for a 're-centering of [the] field towards orienting leadership practice … around issues of pedagogy as opposed to those of management' (p. 183), this chapter critically analyses the application of theoretical perspectives to the development and implementation of elements of an actual graduate leadership programme in a Middle Eastern tertiary institution. Using a Bourdieuian framework, it first provides a contextual overview of the nature of neoliberal policy enactments and their impact on teaching and learning in that higher education setting. It then discusses how the authors developed and implemented courses within the leadership programme with Emirati students, drawing on content from Western and Arabic and Islamic research and based on a social-constructivist perspective and a Habermasian 'communicative action' standpoint where it was important for the students to engage in critical conversations and discussions to compare and contrast ideas and to adapt them to their own leadership context. Finally, the chapter reviews the successes and challenges of the graduate coursework drawing on theoretical views of cultural difference, intercultural education and communicative action, to examine the 'fit' between theory and pedagogical practice in leadership development.

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Introduction

Perspectives on the interaction between people of different cultures have changed considerably over recent decades from that of multi-culturalism (referring to exchanges amongst two or more cultures within a nation state) to what is now termed 'interculturalism' referring to exchange and dialogue between cultures outside the nation state (Besley and Peters 2015). Other terminology has been used, sometimes interchangeably, including cross-cultural and transcultural to reflect shifts in cultural patterns arising from increased globalisation and population movements. One outcome of these cultural 'shifts' particularly in the last two to three decades has been significant changes in education worldwide as the policies and practices of neoliberalism have been 'unleashed' on education systems (Mullen et al. 2013, p. 182). There has been a corresponding process of internationalisation particularly in higher education (HE) (Altbach and Knight 2007). On the one hand, this has resulted in greater student diversity in classrooms following the outflow of students moving freely from their own countries of origin to the 'market' of universities elsewhere in the world. On the other, rapidly developing nation states such as the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf nations have also seen inflows of international expatriate faculty (Kirk 2010). These faculties are seen as helping to make their universities more competitive in relation to their international counterparts and/or to develop a market for branch campuses of well-known universities from elsewhere. In both these contexts, however, student and faculty cultural diversity can run counter to the prevalent neoliberal project in HE characterised by a push for increasingly standardised and convergent curricula and pedagogy.

Recent studies attest to a 'cultural divide' that occurs when pedagogies reflect the dominant culture and policy environment and students' own cultural perspectives are ignored, misunderstood or undervalued (see Hatherley-Green 2012). Jiang (2011), for example, writing about the experiences of Chinese students at New Zealand universities, discusses the 'intercultural incompatibility' that occurs in attitudes to knowledge, learning strategies and student/faculty expectations. Her views are echoed in Hamdan's (2014) study of expatriate teachers in Saudi Arabian higher education. The very concept of 'intercultural education' is rife with semantic complexities, practical pitfalls and thorny theoretical problems (Coulby 2006) within which the advancement of understandings of theory and practice can take a range of analytical pathways.

Mullen et al. (2013) have recently called for a 're-centering of [the] field towards orienting leadership practice and teacher preparation around issues of pedagogy as opposed to those of management' (p. 183). This chapter is a response to their call but rather than offering suggestions about how this might be done it will critically analyse the application of theoretical perspectives to the development and implementation of elements of an actual graduate leadership programme in a Middle Eastern tertiary institution. Using a Bourdieuian framework, it first provides a contextual overview of the nature of neoliberal policy enactments and their impact on teaching and learning in a Middle Eastern higher education setting. The second section of the chapter discusses

how the authors (two Australasian expatriate faculty) developed and implemented courses within a graduate leadership programme with Emirati students, drawing on content from western (e.g. Crippen 2005; Fullan 2004) and Arabic and Islamic (e.g. Al Hinai and Rutherford 2002; Sarayrah 2004; Shah 2006, 2010) research and literature.

McLoughlin's (2001) view that 'culture pervades learning and in designing instructional environments there needs to be serious debate about issues concerning the social and cultural dimensions of task design, communication channels and structuring of information if the needs of culturally diverse learners are to be met' (p. 9) informed the planning of the programme. The pedagogical approaches evolved from a social-constructivist perspective exemplified in Lave and Wenger's (1991) view of learning as a social phenomenon and characterised as 'active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, conversational, contextual and reflective' (Jonasson and Peck 1999, cited in McLoughlin 2001, p. 14). The authors brought a significant level of intercultural competence (Deardoff 2009) to their work with graduates, having taught in an Arab/Emirati context for several years prior. The graduate programme was based on a Habermasian perspective where it was important for the students to engage in critical conversations and discussions to compare and contrast ideas and to adapt them to their own leadership context. What was important was the nature of the dialogue or what Habermas (1984) termed 'communicative action' between the western teachers and Emirati students that served to 'transmit and renew cultural knowledge in a process of achieving mutual understandings' (Besley and Peters 2011, p. 8). Dialogue alone is not sufficient for intercultural education; it needs to occur in an affective context where attitudes such as empathy, curiosity and respect are evident (Perry and Southwell 2011). A further element in the pedagogical approach was the integration of technology in a blended face-to-face and online design drawing on Seimens' (2004) notion of 'connectivism'.

The third section of the chapter reviews the successes and challenges of the graduate programme and draws on theoretical views of cultural difference (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 1998), intercultural education (Coulby 2006) and Habermas's concept of communicative action, to examine the 'fit' between theory and pedagogical practice in leadership development in a Middle Eastern context.

Neoliberal Impact on Higher Education in the Middle East

In this section of the chapter, we provide a contextual overview of the nature of neoliberal policy enactments and their impact on teaching and learning in Middle Eastern higher education, specifically in the UAE context and then use a Bourdieuian framework to analyse some apparent contradictions.

Although the land now known as the United Arab Emirates has been inhabited for centuries by Bedouin tribes and itinerant traders and merchants its birth and development as a federation of seven emirate entities has been recent and rapid. Population growth reflects this; in just over 40 years, the population has grown from

approximately a half million (mostly Emirati nationals) to the current nine and a half million, of which 1.4 million are Emirati nationals (Dubai Online n.d.). This growth has been fuelled by the wealth generated by the export of oil beginning in 1962 which led a change from a largely subsistence economy based on agriculture, pearl diving and fishing to its current basis of commerce and trade, oil and gas, financial and business services, real estate, construction and manufacturing, and tourism. During the latter half of the twentieth century, sons (mainly) of the ruling elites typically completed higher education at prestigious Western institutions, bringing those ideas and perspectives with them on their return to the UAE and their movement into positions of influence within commerce and government. The rapidity of growth has impacted all sectors of Emirati society and in particular the education system. Here, we will examine policy activity in this field, specifically in relation to higher education.

It was during this latter part of the twentieth century that the emergence of an economic orthodoxy and political ideology known as neoliberalism occurred. Although its roots can be traced to the nineteenth century concept of classical liberalism, this revised idea ran rampant throughout governments around the world, particularly from the 1970s, in response to social and economic 'crises' (both real and manufactured). At its core, the ideology of the free market was paramount characterised by minimal intervention from government, including the privatisation of state-owned enterprises (e.g. transport and utilities). Checks and balances such as unionised labour and social welfare were minimised. By the 1990s, many negative results of the neoliberal project became evident including increased disparity between high and low socioeconomic sectors, increased unemployment and poverty, reductions in wages, and fraud and inefficiencies across institutions (Harvey 2007).

The academic literature dealing with the concept of neoliberalism is replete with examples and critique, much of which highlights the negative impact of neoliberal policy and practice. Bourdieu himself was particularly critical of neoliberalism calling it a 'new type of conservative revolution that claims connection with progress, reason and science… [that] ratifies and glorifies the rule of what we call the financial markets, a return to a sort of radical capitalism answering to no law except that of maximum profit; an undisguised, unrestrained capitalism' (Bourdieu 1998, p. 125). Its impact on education policy has also been referred to as 'social Darwinism' (Tienken 2013) where certain policy implementations that appear to be objective (e.g. standardised testing) may actually discriminate against certain groups of students. On the other hand, Rowlands and Rawolle (2013) warn that while the term is mentioned frequently in academic literature, its 'complex and multifaceted nature makes it difficult to define and describe' (p. 1) and that other more nuanced explanations are needed for economic and political influences on education policy.

During the last two decades of growth and expansion, significant changes have occurred in the higher education sector in the UAE and it was impacted by several factors where the influence of neoliberal ideology became apparent in specific ways. First, within the government sector, was the rapid growth of international consultancies involving 'policy borrowing' from predominantly Western perspectives and curricula. The higher education national sector was modelled largely on North

American structure and curriculum content and during the late 1990s and the initial decade of the new century the consultation 'industry' was very active. Consultants were also brought in from the United Kingdom and Australia. A key driver behind the adoption of international structures and curricula was the desire of the government to join the international movement for educational reform and to raise the status of local universities in world ranking systems. Despite the volume of consultancies, the process was not uncontested and concerns about its impact emerged from early on. For example, a prominent tertiary educator warned that:

> All higher education colleges and universities are following curriculum of foreign universities. Instead of following foreign universities, UAE institutions should adopt a local curriculum, ideally suited for the country's environment. (Nazzal 2001)

This view aligns with Bourdieu's concern about how 'globalisation' and uncritical policy borrowing can lead to policy and practice disassociated from its original cultural and socio-historical milieu:

> … these commonplaces of the great new global vulgate that endless media repetition progressively transforms into universal common sense manage in the end to make one forget that they have their roots in the complex and controversial realities of a particular historical society, now tacitly constituted as a model for every other and a yardstick for all things. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999, p. 42)

Their view is echoed in more recent commentary by Samier (2013, in Mullen et al. 2013) who notes that external neoliberal and modernisation forces impacting on the UAE society have led to a shift from traditional social values such as hospitality, loyalty and tolerance (alongside moral and religious ones) to those such as materialism and secularism associated with neoliberal-related practices of industrialisation, urbanisation and technologisation (p. 216). Samier's view has been reaffirmed more recently by Warner and Burton (2017) who note the inherent challenges to, and potential undermining of local/indigenous forms of knowledge by what they term 'Western-oriented modernization' (p. 10) undertaken throughout the wider region.

Currently, there are three government-funded federal HE institutions; UAE University, Zayed University and the Higher Colleges of Technology, but a second major neoliberal impact on higher education was the rapid entry of branch campuses of private international universities and other tertiary institutions. Ahmed and Abdalla Alfaki (2013), for example, note that in a ten-year period from 1997 to 2008, the number of licensed higher education institutions increased from 5 to 58, including some branch campuses of foreign universities, attracted by the high economic growth and private sector investments in higher education. This figure had increased to 71 by 2013 (Ashour and Fatima 2016). Accompanying the rapid growth in HE institutions was the influx of Western-educated faculty in both national and international institutions. The impetus to employ well-qualified international faculty arose from four original policy pillars in the 1970s (Fox 2007) and was reinforced by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research and underpinned by the economic imperative to prepare graduates to contribute to economic growth and development in the expanding globalised position of the UAE.

In the flux and flow of the UAE economy, what was termed the 'education gold rush' (Ashour and Fatima 2016) resulted, for some institutions, in some unanticipated problems of low enrolment, poorly qualified faculty and inferior curricula (Wilkins 2010). The immediate outcome of this was a government requirement for both external international accreditation of public tertiary entities and the development of internal accreditation processes to regulate the private institutions (Goodwin 2006). This aligns with Connell's (2013) view that the neoliberal project underpins the recent growth of 'managerialism' in universities, where the processes for quality assurance together with an increased focus on compliance with government regulatory requirements have led to a reduction in academic democracy, more centralised decision making, and a view of students as customers (p. 103).

A perusal of key policy and strategic planning documents over the last decade and a half provides clear evidence of the impact of neoliberal thinking in the UAE. The Office of Higher Education and Planning in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR; now subsumed within a broader Ministry of Education), for example, published two key reports focusing on the importance of access to higher education by Emirati students (MOHESR 2004a), and on the role of higher education in the future of the UAE (MOHESR 2004b). Two other key reports from the Office of Higher Education and Planning followed in 2007, one of which discussed the status of science and engineering education in the UAE (MOHESR 2007a). Neoliberal perspectives were evident here including a comparative ranking with other countries, and a focus on the need for a competitive workforce, programme quality consistency with international standards and participation in the global economy. The second report (MOHESR 2007b) set an ambitious direction for the country, underpinned again with clear neoliberal perspectives. It sets three goals—to provide educational opportunity for all Emiratis, to ensure high quality education and to contribute to the UAE economic development. The report also included two action items calling for regular programme review at the institutional level and institutional accountability and reporting of student outcomes to the Ministry of Higher Education. These particular items foreshadowed the more recent quality assurance, managerialist regime now embedded in federal institutions. During this period, the UAE government also issued major policy documents outlining key strategic goals and directions for the country, within which higher education featured strongly.

The most recent government initiative for higher education, entitled the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030, was launched by the Ministry of Education in September 2017 (Ministry of Education n.d.). The recurrence of specific terminology clearly identifies its neoliberal underpinnings where the focus is clearly on development of the kinds of technical and practical skills that will support economic growth, the labour market, the knowledge economy and entrepreneurship. The initiative's four main pillars—quality, efficiency, innovation and harmonisation—also reflect a neoliberalist agenda which is evidenced further by the inclusion of managerialist practices such as assessment-based standards, quality control, classification of outputs and reports to establish transparency to support achievement of the initiative.

It is clear that the neoliberal perspective still underpins higher education policy development in the UAE. At a recent Leaders Forum in Abu Dhabi, for example, speakers commented on the need for specialised education courses that aligned with the needs of the job market, and for partnerships to be formed between education institutions, private sector industries, and government bodies (Zaatari 2017). However, the degree to which neoliberal policy and practice has been actually implemented within higher education and wider social and economic sectors remain somewhat ambivalent.

For example, in a recent analysis of the level of success of neoliberal policies in transforming the UAE federal bureaucracy into a 'new public management' (NPM) system, Mansour (2017) argues that the government has achieved success in some economic areas (e.g. privatisation of water and electricity utilities, telecommunications and public transport). However, social services to UAE citizens (free education, health care, and social welfare) have resisted privatisation due to the nature of government–citizen relationships in the tribal-based society. In Bourdieuian terms, the *habitus* of individual citizens within the *field* of social services is resistant to a free market approach to the structure and delivery of those services. What is unique to the UAE is the co-existence of culturally defined 'patron–client' relationships alongside the NPM tools such as e-government, competition, privatisation and quality assurance (Mansour 2017). The influence of local cultural elements on the neoliberalism process has been discussed elsewhere. Elyas and Picard (2013), in their discussion of the Saudi Arabian educational context, suggest that greater scrutiny is needed of the impact of neoliberal reforms on wider social relations (p. 38). While the concept of 'globalisation' implies and standardisation of policy they observe that a concept of 'glocalisation', where local cultural needs impacts the selection, processing and consumption of neoliberal policy, provides a better explanation of what is happening in higher education (p. 38).

The foregoing commentary provides an overview of how a neoliberalist agenda derived from a globalised policy field has influenced policy and practice in a localised field of higher education in the UAE. In analysing its origin and progress, a Bourdieuian perspective can provide some insights. Lingard et al. (2005), while noting that Bourdieu did not actually write about education policy, claim that his key concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capitals* can provide a useful theoretical framework for understanding policy development and implementation. Lingard (2006) further argues that:

> Bourdieu's theoretical stance and methodological disposition allow a way beyond such spatial and national constraints, a necessary position for analyzing and understanding global effects in contemporary educational policy and the emergence of a global policy field in education. (p. 291)

In Bourdieu's conception, individual social 'agents' operate within a particular *habitus* of values, beliefs, and dispositions and possess varying levels of economic, social, cultural and symbolic *capital* that allows them to interact within the structured social spaces or *fields* comprising their own logics, laws of practice, hierarchies and power relations (Lingard et al. 2005).

Lingard et al. (2005) posit the global field of educational policy as not only an economic-related field but also a political project within a process of 'flows' of people and ideas across national borders. They go on to argue that while different nation states possess greater or lesser levels of power 'the amount of 'national capital' possessed by a given nation within these global fields is a determining factor in the spaces of resistance and degree of autonomy for policy development within the nation' (p. 8). Burden-Leahy (2009) develops this idea further in discussing the conundrum of higher education in the UAE, a wealthy developing nation which possesses the economic, social and cultural capital to use its education system to 'reinforce messages about the region, country and religion' (p. 540) but has not yet achieved the higher education success expected from extensive consultancies with Western ideas. She suggests that other global fields are in play that operate to limit the UAE and other developing nations from entering the globalised policy discourse. Lingard et al. (2005) suggest a widening of Bourdieu's concepts to include a category of 'cross-field effects' that would thus allow investigation of the ways that fields and sub-fields interconnect and impact each other (e.g. the national education policy field and the bureaucratic field and the social field and the globalised education policy field) to explain the apparent contradictions that can occur.

Pedagogical Approaches to the Teaching of Educational Leadership in the UAE

In this section, we discuss how we co-constructed and implemented courses within a graduate leadership programme with Emirati students as we worked together over an eight-year period. We had observed students who arrived with a willingness to learn, and yet the educational opportunities presented to them provided an overload of Western content that was not necessarily relevant to critical application in the UAE. Conger (2013) describes three critical shortcomings that limit classroom experiences in leadership education and impede the facilitation and transfer of useful learning and its application to the day-to-day challenges that leaders face: (1) the reality gap, (2) the skill-intensive gap, and (3) the application gap. 'Many of our leadership constructs fail to identify leadership as a process that is highly contingent and multidirectional; instead focusing on models or approaches that offer 'what ifs' versus actual action' (Conger 1992, p. 30).

Our pedagogical approach was based on a Habermasian perspective where it was important for the students to engage in critical conversations and discussions to compare and contrast ideas and to adapt them to their own leadership context. What was important was the nature of the dialogue or what Habermas (1984) termed 'communicative action' between the Western faculty and Emirati students that served to 'transmit and renew cultural knowledge in a process of achieving mutual understandings' (Besley and Peters 2011, p. 8). Dialogue alone is not sufficient for intercultural

education; it needs to occur in an affective context where attitudes such as empathy, curiosity and respect are evident (Perry and Southwell 2011).

In the first instance, we designed the initial course in the programme, one that would lay the foundations of leadership theory that would infuse the other courses across a two-year period. We focused on two key aspects—the learning environment and the course content. As experienced educators, we understood the importance of the classroom environment to support learning and discourse. Here, we aligned with McLoughlin's (2001) view that 'culture pervades learning and in designing instructional environments there needs to be serious debate about issues concerning the social and cultural dimensions of task design, communication channels and structuring of information if the needs of culturally diverse learners are to be met' (p. 9). With regard to the social dimension, we used the term 'colleagues' rather than student to address our course participants as we viewed them as our professional school-based contemporaries. This established a classroom environment of relative equality and reciprocity.

For the course content, our aim was to have the graduates critically compare and contrast Western and Arab/Islamic theories of leadership. In doing so, we utilised a variety of themes and paired them, with one article from each cultural context. Examples of themes included teamwork (Al Rawi 2008; Barry 1991), servant leadership (Crippen 2005; Sarayrah 2004), ethics (Shah 2006; Starratt 1991), shared and distributed leadership (Al Hinai and Rutherford 2002; Oduro 2004) and teacher leadership (Stephenson et al. 2012; York-Barr and Duke 2004; Demir 2015). In addition, we asked course members to critically reflect on their own leadership philosophy and practice and to identify influences on these. Typically, the Emirati students discussed being influenced by leadership models from family, workplace, Emirati national leaders, and the Prophet Muhammad all of which are significant in their culture. This pedagogical approach allowed further opportunities to draw connections to leadership in other cultural contexts.

To lead change and advance educational outcomes, graduate students in the UAE require educational leadership courses that effectively prepare them for their transformational and transformative roles. As such leadership education necessarily values, and is inclusive of, both curricular and co-curricular educational contexts (Andenoro et al. 2013). Curricular content recommended for leadership development in postgraduate students prepares them with knowledge of leadership concepts, skills, dispositions and communication strategies needed for effective and ethical leadership. Experiential learning that is integrated with curricular content enhances the development of leadership and communication skills (Benner et al. 2010). The pedagogical approaches we used evolved from a social-constructivist perspective exemplified in Lave and Wenger's (1991) view of learning as a social phenomenon and characterised as 'active, constructive, collaborative, intentional, conversational, contextual and reflective' (Jonassen and Peck 1999, cited in McLoughlin 2001, p. 14). Students of educational leadership learn well in what Lave and Wenger (1991) term 'communities of practice' that provide relevant experiences, rich feedback, and opportunities for reflection, as well as social support (Berry 2011, p. 1).

The authors brought a significant level of intercultural competence (Deardorff 2009) to our work with graduates, having taught in an Arab/Emirati context for several years prior. Together with the graduate students, we created an exemplar community of practice, which represented the type of innovative learning environment that supports development of leadership competencies in aspirant and practicing educational leaders in the UAE. We took an interdisciplinary approach to leadership education (Jenkins and Dugan 2013), promoting application across contexts, exposure to multiple ideas, and the recognition of situational influences, such as what leadership looks like across disciplines and across different cultural contexts. We re-evaluated the time devoted to conveying and discussing information on leadership versus the time spent by students reflecting on their own situations and applying tools to help them successfully navigate those situations (Conger 2013). The students engaged in critical inquiry into their leadership experience and behaviours which provided a unique opportunity for them to learn to actualise their leadership practices. To support their learning experiences, we compiled knowledge resources and made epistemological decisions about the content of the leadership courses, choosing from textbooks, articles, and videos; websites; and workbooks (see Fink 2013). Through this process, we assembled the essential inputs required to facilitate educational leadership learning for graduate students in their UAE context.

According to Harvey and Jenkins (2014), knowledge, praxis, and reflection are the three critical elements in leadership programmes. A focus on knowledge provides opportunities for students to challenge assumptions, theories, models, and approaches. We encouraged discussion, analysis of case studies and problem-based learning, and critical reflection pedagogies to ensure an environment conducive to teaching and learning leadership in the UAE context. These salient strategies are practical ways for students to develop leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions. Discussion-based pedagogies are frequently used in leadership education (see Jenkins 2012, 2013). It was therefore critical that as leadership educators we facilitated discussions that were intentional and critical. According to Brookfield (2012), to make discussion critical, facilitators should: (a) focus on members identifying assumptions, (b) focus on the degree to which these assumptions are accurate and valid, (c) attempt to fix the contextual validity of assumptions, (d) uncover evidence for generalisations, (e) keep a record of the links in an 'inferential chain,' (f) generate multiple perspectives and (g) be alert for groupthink. Additionally, criteria for evaluating whether a discussion is critical include: (a) structures that are in place to ensure inclusivity, (b) time limits, (c) mutual respect, (d) foci on similarities and differences that emerge, (e) a shared power differential and (f) active listening as the primary goal (Brookfield 2012). We used two broad approaches to discussion. Some occurred in face-to-face classes either with the whole group that allowed for wider sharing of ideas or in small group formats for more focused exchanges. The second format used an online asynchronous discussion forum. The class members individually contributed questions that were related to the course learning outcomes and to aspects of their own leadership role. They then analysed and grouped the questions into themes and for each forum the class was organised into small groups with a discussion leader and a set of protocols to carry it on over a week. The questions

were based in their own school contexts, but they were expected to respond using references to both western and Arab/Islamic material from the course. Both types of discussion were grounded in a social-constructivist framework (Lave and Wenger 1991; McLoughlin 2001) that encouraged a critical analysis of intercultural perspectives. The analysis of western content was constantly underpinned by the question 'How does this "fit" in an Emirati educational context?'

Scholars have alluded to practicing critical reflection—a behaviour that integrates personal experiences with new learning and understanding—to engage and mobilise learners to act on new ideas and to challenge conventional thinking in both theory and practice (Jones et al. 2000; Reynolds 1999). We created opportunities for the graduates to practice critical reflection both individually and collectively to encourage and facilitate the important connection between critical thinking and leadership development (see also Guthrie and Jones 2012; Stedman 2009). Our experience resonated with the views of Brookfield (2012), Dewey (1933), Reynolds (1999) that engaging in critical reflection can create student discomfort and dissonance. Nonetheless, as Fink (2013) and others assert, discomfort often means learners are really thinking and consequently really learning. In leadership education, deep reflective learning requires learners to consider the underlying dynamics of power in the micro-politics of organisational contexts and to question basic assumptions and practices. For example, learners could be required to reassess the power they use in leadership situations to achieve their desired results (Jenkins and Cutchens 2011).

A further element in our pedagogical approach was the integration of technology in a blended face-to-face and online design through both synchronous and asynchronous sessions, drawing on Seimens' (2004) notion of 'connectivism' and its principles that nurturing and maintaining connections is needed to facilitate continuous learning, knowledge may reside in non-human appliances and that obtaining accurate up-to-date knowledge is the intent of connectivist learning activities (p. 5). During the synchronous online classes, faculty were aware of specific cultural beliefs about privacy that can impact the use of virtual classrooms; for example, the graduate students were working in their home environment where the women would not be covered with the traditional *shayla* (headscarf). Thus, to ensure their privacy, the webcam option was not used by the students but only by the faculty instructor. The synchronous online environment allowed for small group discussion similar to the face-to-face context with the added advantage that material could be recorded and used for further analysis or as a resource for coursework. In addition, it was regularly used to set up independent meeting times with groups of students to work collaboratively on class assignments. The faculty instructor could join these if requested to offer additional support. Evaluative data collected from the course participants suggested that the online model was effective, conducive to learning, enhanced student satisfaction and development and stimulated leadership learning.

Our intentional approach offered here is deeply rooted in graduate student leadership development, leadership education theories and pedagogical approaches, and it presents a process that demonstrates practices to empower and engage our emerging leaders. Further, the process supports a foundation for the creation of leadership learning in the UAE educational context.

The 'Fit' Between Theory and Practice

A review of our intercultural pedagogies in a graduate leadership programme identifies both successes and challenges. One of the main successes was the establishment of a classroom learning culture characterised by a community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991) with our graduate colleagues. During our class sessions, they were confident to engage in the kind of Habermasian rational communication necessary for the sharing and exchange of ideas about leadership. The course participants varied from a small number who had recently graduated from university with fresh ideas, to experienced educational leaders with extensive professional practice and thus discussions were rich and productive. Occasionally, as in any critical learning environment, tensions could occur between members, but we encouraged them to view these as opportunity to use their leadership skills to find solutions.

The second key success was the level of engagement by course participants with the intercultural material. The readings, activities and assignments we used allowed graduates to draw strongly on their own cultural experience, both personal and professional, to examine their leadership beliefs and values from an Arab/Islamic perspective and then relate them to Western material to identify the 'fit' with their UAE educational context. Class members frequently went beyond the course material to find additional items to support their work. During communicative exchanges, learning occurred in reciprocal ways. An example of this arose during the analysis of an article which was about Islamic approaches to educational leadership but was set in a different cultural context. One of the class members explained to the others how in that particular context gender factors played out differently to those experienced in UAE educational leadership. This exposed the faculty instructor to new ideas also.

Coulby (2006) maintains that while it is probably impossible for most people to fully understand another culture in a pure sense, nevertheless it is necessary to make an attempt if 'gateways are to be made through the barriers of language and distance' (p. 252). This view resonates with the authors' experiences. A key challenge within the implementation of the graduate course was that of language. The majority of graduate participants spoke Arabic as their first language and while the faculty instructors spoke additional Middle Eastern languages other than their native English, they did not speak Arabic. Thus, an additional invisible barrier was inevitably in place that impacted the subtleties of intercultural discourse where imperceptible differences in meaning and context could impact understanding. We attempted to minimise this where possible by allowing the graduates to converse in Arabic during group discussion and to 'check' their understandings with the faculty instructors in front of the whole class. In addition, we would sometimes ask the class for the Arabic term for a key concept and thus allowed for some negotiation amongst the students themselves about the most appropriate term. In this sense, we were attempting to utilise a Habermasian notion of reciprocity and symmetry in dialogue. One of the successes of our approach was to first use both oral and written forms of communication to share, compare and contrast ideas across cultural perspectives and second, to allow for a more personal form of dialogue between instructor and student where the later

engaged in individual reflection about content, including their emotional reactions to new ideas and course material. The dialogue in that instance occurs at a secondary asynchronous level where written feedback is given by the faculty instructor but at times was followed by face-to-face dialogue where any linguistic queries could be clarified.

The use of an online virtual classroom (first using Blackboard Collaborate software and then Adobe Connect) offered an alternative pedagogical strategy to engage graduate students in course content. However, it did present some communication challenges. First, for cultural and privacy reasons, the participants did not use their webcams, so the faculty instructor had to speak to a disembodied space and thus, the normal facial expression cues were absent and student reactions could not always be gauged. Second, there were occasional technical difficulties with microphone sound levels, or participants being 'dropped out' of the system that slowed the flow and comprehension of communication in a full-class context. The main challenges occurred during full-class presentation-type sessions, so these were used less often and the emphasis was moved to 'breakout sessions' where smaller groups could discuss and analyse content and where the faculty instructor could enter and join in discussion.

This approach allowed for a much higher level of student engagement in direct discussion. The participants were comfortable with the faculty member entering and participating in the small group sessions as a level of trust had been established in faculty–graduate relationships in the face-to-face classes. The trust component has been identified as a key factor in successful intercultural interactions in the information technology context (Zakaria et al. 2003; McLoughlin 2007) and the small group strategy also aligns with McLoughlin's (2007) advice to provide opportunities for students to 'engage in communication and reflection and develop a repertoire of cross-cultural skills and competencies' (p. 24).

While the majority of our graduate students were Emirati nationals, there were sometimes class members from other cultures including Western and other Gulf Cooperating Council (GCC) nations. In this sense, Habermas' notion of communicative rationality took on a more nuanced meaning. Individual values and social norms could impact on inter-student communication in sometimes unexpected ways. An instance of this happened in one class where tensions arose between two students, ostensibly about responsibility for shared group work, but which the faculty instructor realised were based on a subtler cultural issue related to religious perspectives, and one that she did not fully understand herself. Despite sensitive intervention, the tension was not resolved. There is a difference here between the ideal of rational communication and the reality of underlying psychological factors, values and beliefs (Hillier 2003).

The topic of cross- or intercultural communication has been extensively addressed in the literature, and the work of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998), extending Hofstede's (1983) seminal work on cultural dimensions, is an example of this. However, much of their work is about negotiation and interaction in business or commercial contexts and based predominantly on the experiences of males. The intercultural interaction between the authors and our mostly Emirati female students

occurred in a collaborative rather than a transactional context and thus does not necessarily align with the dual-dimension typology of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998). In this case, it is potentially more useful to consider the views of Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly (1998) who note that while a particular dimension of collectivism may be applied to Arabic societies, there may be tendencies towards individualism within those societies. Rather than dualities of culture, it may be better to think of a continuum with opposing dimensions clustered towards each end but along which groups and individuals may fit at differing points. In this respect, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) suggest that cultures 'dance' from their preferred point to the opposite and back again in cross-cultural exchanges (1998, p. 27) thus allowing for reconciliation of seemingly opposing values. We saw evidence of this where course members explored similarities as well as differences between cultural explanations of leadership and its practice.

In more recent work, Trompenaars and Voerman (2009) have further explored the notion of values reconciliation using the concept of servant leadership as a vehicle for doing so, with its fundamental view that 'beneath all cultural differences, there is a common basis, namely, being human' (p. xiv). This perspective resonates strongly with our coursework where the graduate students compared and contrasted Western and Bedouin concepts of servant leadership and found a strong commonality between the two in terms of the espoused humanistic values and practices underpinning each. These include empathy, listening, awareness, building community, stewardship and commitment to the growth of others.

Fresh perspectives on the complexities of culture are seen in other contexts. As the fields of information systems, information management and information and communications technology have developed and penetrated globalised systems and virtual organisations the literature has focused more attention on intercultural issues within these spheres (e.g. Myers and Tan 2002; Karahanna et al. 2005; Srite and Karahanna 2006). Myers and Tan (2002) challenged the then prevailing notion of 'national' culture (Hofstede 1983; Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner 1998) to suggest that in the field of global information systems culture should be seen as 'contested, temporal and emergent' (p. 11) and that studies of a 'national' culture are too simplistic and suffer from theoretical and methodological flaws. This idea was further developed by Karahanna et al. (2005) who posit that workplaces have fundamentally changed through increased globalisation, increased immigration, the emergence of virtual organisations where members communicate via computer technology and the growth of sophisticated telecommunications systems (p. 1). They suggest that in any organisational context individuals operate within six interrelated levels of culture (individual, group, organisational, professional, national and supranational) and that their behaviour results from the dynamic interaction of these six levels. Karahanna et al. (2005) go on to argue that two key components in a culture are values and practices the former of which is mainly influenced by supranational (i.e. ethnic or religious) and national levels while practices are predominantly influenced by professional and organisational cultures (p. 7). Thus, in the context of our graduate programme that is concerned with leadership practice, the participants' interactions with the faculty and with each other would be influenced by professional organi-

sational and group cultures, but within the framework of their broader Emirati and Islamic values (or other national cultures for non-Emirati participants). The initial theoretical framework developed by Karahanna et al. (2005) appears to provide a useful 'fit' to analysing the types of interactions we observed in our work with graduate leadership students.

Conclusion

Our aim in this chapter was to respond to the call of Mullen et al. (2013) for a 're-centering of the field towards orienting leadership practice … around issues of pedagogy as opposed to those of management' (p. 183). In doing so, we have identified particular pedagogies for the teaching of educational leadership in an Arabic/Islamic context, grounded in both a Habermasian concept of 'communicative action', and a social-constructivist perspective that views learning as a social phenomenon enacted in a collaborative, intentional, active and reflective manner. As Western-educated faculty engaged in the preparation of educational leaders for mainly Emirati schools, we believed that it was essential to provide intercultural perspectives about leadership theory and practice that allowed course participants to critically discuss, compare and contrast material reflecting their own cultural context with that from a Western viewpoint so that they could adapt leadership practices that were an appropriate fit to their schools. In addition to suitable course content, we focused on the development of the kind of affective environment where participants were treated as colleagues and where they could freely engage in debate, critical reflection and exchange of ideas as they deepened their understanding of educational leadership. The establishment of this community of practice was a key success in our approach, together with the levels of engagement by course members with the intercultural material. We also faced challenges related to language and the use of technology. Our experience showed that, despite some occasional issues arising from student personal interactions, the underlying frameworks of communicative action and social constructivism provide a sound basis for the kinds of engagement we were aiming for. However, we found that the dual-dimensional view of culture espoused by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) did not provide an adequate explanation for the intercultural exchanges occurring in our courses (although Trompenaars' more recent discussion about servant leadership did resonate). The more complex theoretical framework put forward by Karahanna et al. (2005) appeared to relate more closely to the nuances of interaction that we observed between ourselves and the students and between the students themselves.

Our commentary has provided a practical example of the development and implementation of an approach to leadership education in the Middle East in an attempt to examine the 'fit' between theory and practice. In doing so, it contributes to an understanding of the ways in which theory and practice are linked and opens opportunities for further examples of approaches to the realities and complexities of leadership education in Muslim countries.

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